■ Lifestyle / C5
Playgrounds of the rich and famous

■ World / A8
600 Iraqis killed in week of chaos

■ Entertainment / A17
Carrie out but happy and relieved

■ Sports / A19
Mickelson wins first major

Tatsong ng Bayan / A17
Malikhaing Pinoy: World-class pa rin ba?

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Mike, Chiz: Friends from rival campaigns

By Juliet Labog-Javellana and Carlos Pablo

TEETH young GMA office- ...ension opposing sides. But Mishos' 'Mike' Defensor and Secretary Ruy Elefante 'Chiz' Escudero, campaign

Ombudsman clears Gloria on Maynilad 'bailout' deal

By Veh Contreras

THE OFFICE of the Ombudsman yesterday junked the plunder case filed against Pres. dent Macapagal-Arroyo, two officials of the Department of Justice and 10 officers of Benpres Holdings in connection with the alleged government bailout of the ailing water

GMA now leads FPJ, says latest survey

Still very close fight, Pulse Asia poll shows

By Juliet Labog-Javellana

IT'S STILL a "very close fight," but President Macapagal-Arroyo has finally gained a lead over actor Fernando Poe Jr., breaking the statistical tie that both found themselves in in the past two months, a private polling firm said yesterday.

Pulse Asia Inc. said that of the 1,800 nationally representative registered voters it polled from March 27 to April 4, 36 percent said they would vote for Ms Macapagal, while 31 percent said they would choose Poe.

Ms Macapagal enjoyed a slim lead of 1.6 percentage points in the survey had a margin of error of plus or minus 1.6 percentage points at the 95-percent confidence level.

"This is the first time that [President Arroyo has a statistically significant lead, although small, over Mr. Poe," Pulse Asia executive director Ana Maria L. Tabunda said in a statement.

Retired Sikhastian Secretary Raul Roco was third with 12 percent, followed by Panfilo Lacson with 10 percent. Bro. Eddie Villanueva was at the bottom with 1 percent.

In the vice presidential race, Sen. Noli de Castro, Ms Macapagal's running mate, continues to lead, getting 39 percent, while Loren Legarda, Poe's running mate, obtained 23 percent.

The respondents were asked to write down on a ballot the names of their chosen candidates, simulating actual voting procedures.

"Interestingly, 10 percent of Filipino voters are unable or refuse to say who their presidential bet is ... , slightly higher than the proportion of the electorate expressing the same sentiment in

A FILIPINO truck driver, who has yet to be identified, appears on an Arabic television station as one of eight foreigners who were held hostage in Iraq. A masked man then said on videotape that the hostages had been released.

Rebs seize mayor for not paying election fee

By Marlon Ramos, Madanita T. Rivata and Delfin T. Mallari Jr.
PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

A GROUP of 30 heavily armed communist guerrillas abducted the mayor and vice mayor of Pola, Oriental Mindoro, until 11 other people on Sunday after they acquiesced to pay the "permit-to-campaign" fee demanded by the rebels, police said yesterday.

Mayor Alex Asuncion was released unharmed along with nine others some 3 hours after they were seized by New People's Army (NPA) guerrillas while campaigning in a recreation park of Barangay Campamento in Bulalacao.

Vice Mayor Arturo Mariano and an aide, who had been taken an hour earlier while pulling up campaign posters nearby, were among those released.

A police report said the rebels were still holding on to Asuncio's three bodyguards—Army Pfc. James Michael B. Bacuclas and Rommel S. Javier, and Police Officer Ronald E. Montemayor.

Chief Supt. Alejandro Lapitad, police director of Mimaropa, Mrs. Gloria Mendoza-Bonifacio and Asuncion, said the police and the military have launched an "all-out operation" to rescue the captives after negotiations between Asuncion and the rebels broke down.

In a phone interview with the local radio station DWAD-AM in Pola, Asuncion related that he and his 30 companions were heading back to Barangay Campamento on board two vans when they were flagged by a group of men with high-powered guns.

Asuncion said he and his entourage—campaign aides and an inspection trip of a project of Sen. Noli de Castro in the village—felt a the harassment of the rebels, who is running for vice president in the administration coalition.

He said the rebels mentioned themselves among the die-hard and more stubbornly waiting for

Filipino among foreign hostages in Iraq

By Jaymalin Arcinas and Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

PHNOMPENH: In stumbled the words "Philippines" when he was shown on Arab television along with other hostages held by hooded kidnap gunmen.

He was one of dozens of foreign nationals whose fate past week by navigators in Iraq demanding the pullout of coalition troops.

In a videotape aired by Arabic television station Al Jazeera on Sunday, a masked man announced the release of the eight foreign men described as truck drivers who had supplied "the forces of the enemy" Marines to protest.

"We have released them in response to a call from the Muslim Clerics Association ... after we were sure that they will not deal with the occupation forces again," the man said.

FULL STORY A10

Don't let Abu escapees leave Basilan, GMA orders

By Juliet Labog-Javellana and Christian Esguerra

CORDON off Basilan, if necessary, and hunt them down.

Saying this was no time for blame-tossing, President Macapagal-Arroyo yesterday ordered a massive manhunt for 25 inmates—10 of them Abu Sayyaf bandits—still at large after a bloody breakout of dozens of detainees from the Basilan provincial jail.

"If the massive manhunt requires cordoning off the whole Basilan perimeter to prevent the escapees from fleeting to other provinces, so be it," the President said in a statement.

She said the Abu Sayyaf fugitives posed a threat not only to the witnesses against them in court, including the wives of the hostages the brutal group had beheaded, but to the whole Basilan community.

"Let us stop the blame-tossing and finger-pointing and step up this problem instead," Ms Macapagal said. "Let us get the Bagsik fiend and resolve the issues of accountability later."

Gil Haymundo Nerez, Army brigade commander, said in Isabela City that the military had already "established a sea blockade to ensure that the fugitives will not slip out the province." He did not say how many ships were involved in the operation to cordon off the tadpole-shaped island with an area of 1,259 square km.

The military said on first it had warned Basilan jail officials of a plot by the Abu Sayyaf suspects to escape and asked them to reinforce the prison security.

The Black Saturday breakout has become a political embarrassment for Arroyo less than a month before the May 10 presidential election, with lawyer polls showing her either regaining a

Angara stays on in FPJ coalition, slams Lacson for 'bullying ways'

By Carlos Pablo, Norman Bordadora and Michael Lim Ubac

SEN. Edgardo Angara is staying on in Fernando Poe Jr.'s koalisyon ng Nagkakaisang Pilipino, according to Norwegian Ship Owners Association, Poe's campaign spokesperson.

Members made the statement early yesterday amid talk that Sen. Panfilo "Ping" Lacson, the other opposition presidential candidate, wanted Angara out of the KNP if unity negotiations were to succeed. (See related story on Page A2.)

"He [Angara] is part of the KNP," Escudero said. "Unless there are indications otherwise, he's helping."

Lacson confirmed yesterday in a press conference in Manila, Iloilo, that he and Poe had a telephone conversation early morning on Easter Sunday. He said Angara's removal from the KNP was only a suggestion and not a demand for unification talks to continue.

Asked if he had discussed Angara's ouster with Poe, Lacson said, "No, we didn't discuss it, but it came out in our conversation. He identified the problem not only within the LDP [Lakas ng Demokratikong Pilipino] ... He said we (the Senator Angara is the problem of the KNP as well."

He added: "Any negotiation will be for naught if Angara stays in their camp. This, I think, they also appreciate."

Poe in a phone call made to the Inquirer early last night, Angara said Lacson was "delusional" for "concocting a wild tale" about his possible unification with Poe's camp.

"The way he's behaving ... his bullying ways ... he is making what he calls unification impossible," Angara said of Lacson.

Angara declared that no one could force him out of the KNP because "I was the one who

SUMMER DIP
Golden days of summer, like this tourist, enjoy the cool waters of White Island, to escape the scorching April sun. This beach-lover's haven is a deserted sandbar in Mambajao, Camiguin.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
TUESDAY, APRIL 13, 2004
Second FRONTPAGE

WEATHER FORECAST

'Full court press' for FPJ

RELIGION AND ELECTION

SC tackles church endorsement

By Philip C. Tubeza

Binay, Sotto to split work as KNP campaign managers

By Carlos Conde

GMA camp not yet giving up on El Shaddai

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

Bishop's warning was against FPJ, Lakas solon says

RP safe from 'Cosme'

11,000 absentee Pinoys cast votes

By Jerome Aning and Marcio P. Mateo

Top LRT blast suspect ordered transferred

TIGHT SLAPPING: Yunos escorted by guards to the Manila RTC. (INQUIRER)

By Tarra Quismundo

THE MAN who stands trial for the December 2000 bombing of the Light Rail Transit would soon be joining members of the Abu Sayyaf Group and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front who are in detention in Bicutan.

Mukhlis Hadji Yunos, the only man among the 11 charged for the Rizal Day bombing, would be transferred to Camp Bagong Diwa in Bicutan, Taguig.

Yesterday, the court granted the motion of state prosecutor Peter Ong to transfer the suspect, who is in the custody of the Police Anti-Crime Emergency Response (Pacer) in Camp Crame, Quezon City, to Bicutan.

Yunos and his lawyer Fidel Manzaraga have no problem with the transfer, said Ong in an interview after the suspect's re-arraignment at the Manila Regional Trial Court Branch 20, a family court.

Yunos would be in the custody of the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology, sharing the same detention facility of Abu Sayyaf leader Khadafy Janjalani, also known as Commander Robot.

The faction came following the escape of 53 detainees and 34 ASG members from a Muslim provincial jail. Ong, however, said he had no doubts about the security at Camp Crame. But after consulting with the National Bureau of Investigation and the PNP Intelligence Group, the prosecution thought it best to transfer Yunos for his own safety.

"Besides, his detention at (Camp) Crame is temporary. He should have been detained at the city jail—Bicutan is part of city jail," explained Ong.

Yunos was brought to Camp Crame, the national headquarters of the Philippine National Police, after he was arrested in Cotabato in Oct. to May 25 last year.

His fellow accused, Indonesian bomb expert Dulmo Ambotan alias Ghan, escaped detention at the PNP Intelligence Group detention cell in Camp Crame, with alleged Abu Sayyaf members Abdulmukim Idris and Omar Dab Lasal on July 14, 2003. The rest of the accused in the Rizal Day bombings are at large.

In June 2002, Pentagon kidnap-for-ransom gang leader Nasir Bloodmordmar and kidnapping suspects Abdul Muminipang and Sukkilo Tamino also escaped detention at Camp Crame.

Bella Al-Ghazzali Mandondalan were later killed in pursuit operations of the police and the military.

At yesterday's re-arraignment, Judge Galileo Gorlla's sala, Yunos was accused by three eyewitnesses and two PNP Special Action Forces (SAF) members.

The Muslim native spoke to fluent to enter a plea to the charges of multiple murder, multiple frustrated murder, and multiple attempted murder.

He entered a guilty plea when he was first arraigned on July 8 last year, but he changed his initial saying that he did not fully understand what he was being asked when he entered his plea.

The event, shocking by prosecutors, entered a plea of not guilty in his behalf.

The media were not allowed inside the family room, where the court interviewed for the first time yesterday must in transfer from a special criminal court. Yunos was the first of the 30 cases that Cotabato based yesterday before jampacked courtrooms.

Ong had requested the re-raffle of the cases, as inland were among the 12 killed and 150 injured in the LRT bombing. He said that he only acquired the birth certificates of the witness landed only last September.

The pre-trial is set on June 14, where the prosecution and the defense would agree on the witnesses and documents that they would present in court.

2 DQ cases tackled today

By Marvin P. Marfil

THE COMMISSION on Elections will tackle two disqualification cases against President Macapagal-Arroyo today.

One of the cases, filed by broadcaster Ariel Ouano, will be resolved by the second division while the other, filed by the group called Pro-Constitution, has been scheduled for hearing by the Comelec's first division.

Ouano, who had filed one of the earliest disqualification cases, is seeking the disqualification of Ms Macapagal's certificate of candidacy alleging that the document was not properly filed.

According to Ouano, Ms Macapagal had the document sworn before an assistant City Prosecutor, an official whom the respondents describe as one who lacked the authority to do so.

This act, Ouano alleged, rendered the document a "mere scrap of paper."

The pre-litigation of the Ouano case has been set for 10 a.m. today.

The second case—scheduled for hearing also at 10 a.m.—was filed by lawyer Jose Vicente Salazar of Pro-Gen, which is seeking the disqualification of Ms Macapagal because she had allegedly violated the election ban 120 minutes of television advertising allowed for each candidate.

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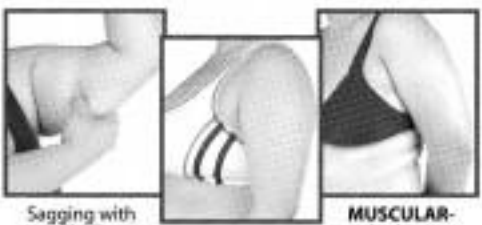

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Mike, Chiz: Friends from rival campaigns

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Front page A1

spokespersons for President Macapagal-Arroyo and Fernando Poe Jr., respectively, are not pitching to winners in each other.

Mike describes Chiz as "very competent," and Chiz says simply "We're friends."

Still, their differences are striking.

As members of the 12th Congress, Mike was with the "Spice Boys," who played a prominent role in the impeachment of President Joseph Estrada in 2000, and Chiz was with the "Bright Boys," the pro-Estrada group.

Today, Rep. Benigno "Bentoy" Aquino III, a friend to both, pointed out fundamental ideological differences in the two products of the University of the Philippines.

"Mike is an activist—the evils of martial law were very close to him," said Bentoy. As for Chiz, "industrial as many can. He's loyal to his father."

Chiz's father is Salvador "Sonny" Escudero, a former official of the late strongman Ferdinand Marcos and now senatorial candidate of Fpm's Reelectionist Pagkakaisang Pilipino.

According to Bentoy, Mike was more able to ride on issues during the Estrada administration—"Lahat nang salot sa bansa"—while Chiz had to keep quiet because he was on Estrada's side.

"Mike is a lot freer to choose his own destiny," Bentoy said, adding:

"Chiz is more prudent, being a lawyer, while Mike is emotional. But when they are committed to something, they will stick to it."

'Good vs evil'

Mike also heads the administration's 8-9 tactics group, which decides when the President and the rest of her slates are to campaign.

He said that during the kick-off of campaign spokespersons last Dec. 1, more than two months before the national campaign period began, he reported the opposition to Edsa 1st, and Chiz was a logical choice.

"Chiz is very competent," Mike said. "It's very eloquent and articulate but on the saping gees, its a fight between good and evil, good will always triumph. It's not so much that I have an advantage over Chiz [in that] as an issue people's perception, I am on the good side."

Asked how he sees himself standing poised for pound against Mike, Chiz said: "Why are you making us fight when we're friends?"

"Perhaps the difference between us is that I've spent more time in school compared to him," Chiz added. "Mike, of course, has greater experience in politics because he started early."

At 34, Mike is the youngest spokesperson for the Macapagal.

On Jan. 25, 2001, a few days after she was sworn in as President, Mike was named chair of the Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council from which he is an honed. He was only 31 then, apparently the youngest Cabinet member in recent history.

Before then, he was a two-term congressman of the third district of Quezon City. He was the youngest member of the House during his first term in 1998. His political career began with a stint at the Quezon City council in 1992, when he was only 22.

At the UP where he obtained a bachelor's degree in history in 1991 and a master's degree in public administration in 1999, Mike served as vice chair of the Student Council. He was also national chair of the National Union of Students of the Philippines.

In 1999, Asiaweek magazine named him one of Asia's Political Leaders of the New Millennium. He was counted among the "new breed of politicians and activists" who were expected to break out of traditional politics and refuse the system-style dynasties.

No slouch

But Chiz, a UP summer intern kindergarten, and a debater during his college days, is no slouch on the credentials department.

He acquired a law degree in 1998 and was a member of the Order of the Purple Feather, an honor society in the UP College of Law. In between the studies, he was a teaching assistant in the UP Department of Political Science.

He also acquired a master's degree in international law and comparative law at the Georgetown University in Washington, completing it between 1995 and 1996.

Before going to Georgetown, he was an associate at the Bautista, Picazo, Reyno, Tan & Fider Law Office, and a legal counsel in the UP College of Law.

To round off his education, Chiz took some general staff course (gsc) at the Armed Forces. He was given the rank of commander in the Philippine Navy Reserve Commandos (2002).

Chiz was first elected congressman of the first district of Sorsogon in 1998.

Currently, he is a partner at the Escudero, Marasigan, Valderia & Villareal Law Office, host of the radio program "Usapang de Campanilla" over dzmm (since 2003, in code-really mixed than impeccable English to Boston Filipino).

Now on his second term in the House, Chiz is also spokesperson of the country's second largest political party, the Nacionalista Peoples Coalition of business tycoon Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco.

He is seeking a third term. The talk in the House is that if Poe wins, Chiz is a cinch as Speaker, the youngest in the history of the Philippine Congress.

He makes her laugh

Mike is supposedly one of only two Cabinet members who could make the President laugh (the other one said to be Raul Roco, now ambassador of the Alyansa ng Bagong Asia, whose humor is self-educator sorority).

In a recent campaign trip, Mr. Macapagal was shooting at Mike for her heroic schedule that hardly gave her time to prepare her speech. Five minutes to lunch, she was still in a bad mood.

Anxious about the crowd waiting to greet her at the airport, Mike told her: "Madam President, we're about to land. Think of your granddaughter Mikaela."

Ms Macapagal laughed and replied: "I'll just think of you."

According to Mike's fellow Cabinet members, he can ease the tension when the going gets rough.

One methodical recalled that one of the "major gloomy days" was when foes angrily resigned last year as education secretary upon learning that the Presidential Anti-Graft Commission was investigating her for unjust enrichment involving anomalous lab department.

The cronies said they did not know how to explain the resignation of Reyes, who had started saying negative things about the President.

"It was a very volatile situation and everyone was saddened by it. There was a lull during the Cabinet meeting and no one could speak," the cronies said.

And then Mike supposedly said: "Madam President, you see just say that all Cabinet secretaries wanted beside [then Public Works] Secretary [Simeon] Datumanong had quit?"

It was not a real solution to the problem, but it made Ms Macapagal and the rest of the Cabinet laugh, the cronies said.

The inevitable started ribbing (accompanying that Dom Pomposturian fun-ruler Pandemonium Slave President and their Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. and then-wives all treated female him in the state dining room before they resigned.

Diehard fan

Chiz is a diehard fan of Poe who swears to having watched nearly all of the actor's movies, whether on the wide screen, on tape and in TV reruns.

He said that back in 1999 when he was to marry his wife Christine Elizabeth, he and Mommy Poe were classmates in Wharton.

Recalled Chiz: "My fellow congressmen had lobbied to fund for projects in their respective districts for Erap's approval. But I had only one request: Invite them to [Poe's] son get him as one of my wedding sponsors."

He said Estrada laughed, spoke with Poe on the phone, and suddenly passed the phone to Chiz.

"I was surprised and I didn't know what to tell him," said Chiz, who had yet to meet the actor then. "The first words that came out of my mouth were: 'Hello, idol! Good afternoon. Can you be one of my wedding sponsors?'"

Estrada guaranteed to Chiz that Poe would come to the wedding. Indeed, when the presidential limousine drove up to the church, Estrada descended from the right side and Poe from the left.

"And that was the first time I met FPJ," Chiz said.

"I shook his hand and I noticed it was huge. I asked him what had happened and he said he had some bone a movie shooting and the bone he was riding made a sudden spin.

"He tried to stop it, but his hand got burned by the reins."

Near-Spartan lifestyle

Pilots idolized has met for the second time in February 2004, this had an offer for Chiz to serve as his campaign spokesperson.

"He said he has searched me and liked what he saw—calm, soft, not easily provoked," Chiz said. "It didn't take much convincing because, first, my father is running under [the 4th] and second, from the start, as history to most presidentiable ang look de 10 is he to whom I was most drawn."

The discussions took all of three days at Poe's residence in Greenhills, San Juan.

"Or was it two things," Chiz said. "I asked all the questions I wanted to ask. I wanted to see where he was coming from, what he thinks about a lot of things."

Chiz said what struck him during those meetings was the Poes' almost Spartan lifestyle.

"You can't see any newly bought accounts in his home: Chairs, kitchen sets, tables and chairs, his many beds, vase, paintings—all are old. He's a millionaire many times over and he still watches his own things if he wants to."

He bought his Greenhills house perhaps during the 1990s and the one in Antipolo in the 1970s. In other words, they're content with what they have, and they don't flaunt what they have earned in the entertainment industry.

For me, that's a very important trait for one aspiring for leadership. Making him so human (No talk for more). Because the most difficult situation is to give power to a person who is narcissistic and wants to get more and more.

"FPJ is happy with what he has. That's how he is before he entered politics. So I have great confidence that when he becomes president, his administration will be clean. He will do what's best for the country for the greater majority."

More of a manager

Mike is constantly focused on the job at hand, trying to make reporters understand Ms Macapagal and get her message across.

"The President is more of a manager than a politician," he said. "She's high on soup. She dashed off her state cpr really go high when things are not done efficiently. But when she's mad at someone, she's not belittling that person but ... the act."

He said the "destabilization plots" against the President in the past three years had also put undue pressure on her.

"She deserves to let off her chest some of the anger and the frustrations, but she is a very, very kind person," he said. "She really look for the poor, but her way of showing it is not by screaming up to a person but by looking into how she can really change the life of that person in terms of programs."

Proposal to regulate college tuition shelved

By Dona Z. Pazzibugan

TERTIARY-LEVEL students and their parents will have to dig deeper into their pockets this year.

This after education officials shelved plans to regulate fee increases by colleges and universities until next year.

With just two months before the next school opening, the Commission on Higher Education has yet to come up with its promised interim guidelines on school fee hikes.

"It will not be implemented this year but next school year," said CHED executive director John Vitriolo yesterday.

This has riled not just hundreds of many schools but already set their fee increases for the coming school year, after having completed their "consultations" with their students by Feb. 28.

Under the present guidelines, school executives have to "consult" with their students before hiking tuition.

"It is still for schools to change the rules now? since they had complied with the old rules," Vitriolo said.

Consultations are not required in the case of miscellaneous fee hikes.

In February, CHED chair Rev. Orlando Quinto (SJ) announced that the agency would regulate school fee increases beginning this school year.

Quinto said many colleges and universities had abused the tuition deregulation policy which has been in place the past 22 years.

He said CHED would come up with the new guidelines in March in time for the June school opening. But Quinto is currently on medical leave.

In an interview yesterday, Vitriolo said that schools would find it "very difficult" to comply with any new guidelines at this time.

"We have to be prospective, not retroactive," he said.

He said the decision to postpone implementation of the new guidelines was arrived at on April 2 during a consultation with school and student groups.

Nevertheless, CHED would come up with the new guidelines within the month, Vitriolo promised.

Quinto had said that schools would have to get the approval of their students, parents and CHED if they raised fees beyond the inflation rate.

But Vitriolo said CHED's approval may no longer be necessary.

He said the proposed guidelines would allow inflation-based fee increases.

If the fee increases are higher than the inflation rate, the school owners would then have to consult with their students.

"But when [the increase] is greater, then [it] should be approved [by CHED]," Vitriolo said.

CANCER KIDS

Cancer victims Tawni Hallows and Rosario Navarro are cheered by hairdresser Nicky Reyes, Loti Macapagal-Arroyo and a clown at the Nursing Persons Cancer Institute of the University of the Philippines Philippine General Hospital during the celebration of Reyes' birthday Monday. Reyes, who had adopted the center as his favorite charity, asked for his fans to donating medicines and gifts to some 500 children afflicted with cancer. The President's daughter is his special guest.

Free acquitted detainees, Davide orders

By Philip C. Tubeza

NO MAN shall serve more than his time.

Chief Justice Hilario Davide Jr. has ordered all trial court judges throughout the country to immediately cause the release of detainees whose cases had been dismissed by the courts or who had been acquitted of the charges they faced.

In a memorandum order dated April 2, Davide said that despite their acquittal or the dismissal of their cases, a number of persons remained "detained for days, if not weeks or even months," due to delays in the processing and delivery of their release orders to the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP).

"Upon therefore, all trial judges are directed to be study with an Order of Release on the date set for promulgation of a decision," Davide said in the memo.

His directive also covered accused persons who had been under detention for a period equal to or greater than the maximum prison term for the crime they face in court.

Davide said release orders should be signed as soon as an accused is acquitted or the charges against him dismissed.

He said trial court judges should immediately direct the court clerk or process server to give a copy of the release order to the BJMP officer escorting the prisoner.

"The escort shall be under strict orders to deliver the release order to the jail warden who, in turn, shall immediately enforce it subject to verification if the prisoner has other cases," Davide said.

Exec raises alert vs JI terrorists

By Jeffrey H. Tupas
PDI Mindanao Bureau

KIDAPAWAN CITY—A special prosecutor on anti-terrorism from the Department of Justice (DOJ) rose to Mindanao last week to inform local leaders on the presence of the Al-Qaida-linked Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) cells in key cities in the region.

North Cotabato Gov. Emmanuel Pinol said yesterday that the DOJ representative personally alerted officials from the cities of Iligan, Cagayan, Koronadal, Cotabato and General Santos on the movement of JI elements, a group of highly trained terrorists largely based in neighboring Indonesia.

According to Pinol, the junior department emissary said that those behind the October 2002 bombing in Kidapawan that killed a number of people and wounded many others were members of JI. He said there was a possibility that other bombings in other cities were perpetrated by the terrorists.

"We have always been on alert for possible JI activities," Pinol said, adding that local officials were bracing for terror plots "given the fact that JI is operating in Kidapawan as mentioned by the Department of Justice."

Gunmen kidnap 3 men off Sabah

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia—Armed men dressed in military fatigues kidnapped at least three people off a boat in Malaysian waters near the southern Philippines, a newspaper reported here Monday.

Gunmen on speed boats attacked a container grabbing a barge loaded with sand to a port in the fourth-richest state of Sabah, taking two Malaysians and at least one other crew member but leaving behind others, who alerted authorities, The Star newspaper reported on its Web site.

Details of the attack were sketchy and Sabah police refused to comment, the paper said. Officials in Kuala Lumpur were not immediately available to comment.

In the Philippines, Navy spokesman Commander Ernesto Mildaraan said Malaysian army officials in Sabah had notified the Navy that three people, including the owner of the boat, were abducted in the incident late Sunday near Balusigan island in Malaysia. He had no further details.

Kidnap raids in Sabah have occurred several times in recent years, and were blamed on rebel groups in the southern Philippines, including the al-Qaida-linked Abu Sayyaf terrorist group.

Most recently, Abu Sayyaf bandits seized five Indonesians and five Filipinos from a Sabah resort in October 2002. Officials refused to pay ransom and their fate is unknown although they are believed being held in Tawi-Tawi. AP

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Filipino among foreign hostages …

Looking frightened, the men—three from Pakistan, two Turks, an Indian, a Nepali and a Filipino—stood one close to another, surrounded by armed captors, their hands bound behind them, according to reports.

Portions of the video footage were shown on Manila television last night, gripping thousands of viewers.

Who is the man?

In words tumbled incoherently out of the Filipino hostage's mouth, the man in Iraq suddenly seemed so close to home.

DH spokesperson Asha Imam said the department was ascertaining the man's identity and condition and that the Philippine Charge d'Affaires in Iraq, Victorio Dukoy, had been instructed to see what could be done to help him.

Hired workers

Henderson said some Filipinos were in Iraq working for coalition forces that had hired them from firms in Europe and Middle Eastern countries, such as Jordan and Kuwait, for reconstruction work in Iraq.

The DFA does not have an exact record of how many Filipinos…

Henderson said the department had a hard time documenting Filipino workers because they were registered in the countries where their firms were located and would often stay in Iraq for only a short while.

Iraq has seen a wave of hostage-taking over the last week as violent confrontations with Sunni and Shiite rebels pushed across the country ahead of a June 30 deadline for the US-led administration to hand power to an interim Iraqi government.

Threat to kill

Another Islamic militant group in Iraq claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of 12 Turks and said it would kill them unless Turkey withdrew its troops from Iraq.

The Turks were among 28 foreigners, including Japanese, Bulgarians, Americans, Israelis, Spanish and Koreans.

Al Jazeera said militants holding three Japanese would begin killing their hostages unless their demands—including the withdrawal of Japanese troops from Iraq—were met within 24 hours.

The latest to be taken hostage were seven Chinese citizens who were abducted on Sunday after entering Iraq from Jordan, and a British contractor.

Despite the outbreak of fighting in Iraq, the United States is reducing the number of soldiers in Iraq as part of its humanitarian and peacekeeping efforts.

Vice Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Diosdado Garcia said the Philippine troops in Iraq were safe.

AFP assurance

"Our troops in Iraq are okay," he said. "There has been some fighting in their sectors, but control station of the multinational division headed by the Polish contingent. That's about 20 kilometers from Al-Hilla where our troops are. They are continuing with their humanitarian work."

Despite the fresh deployment, Garcia said the AFP had actually reduced its presence in Iraq by almost half the original number.

He said there were now 40 members of the Philippine contingent, including 41 from the AFP and eight from the Philippine National Police.

On April 4, the AFP dispatched 30 more personnel, including a medical doctor, a surgeon and two dentists.

"They have been flown in to replace the electricians who had been rotated and that includes several medical elements coming from the armed forces since the Department of Health personnel are not going back," Garcia said. "So they have been replaced by medical personnel from the armed forces."

Hulacsahang in quandary

Before that, the Philippine contingent in Iraq had numbered 96, composed of 51 soldiers, 26 policemen and 51 DOH personnel.

The bulk of that number flew home after fighting between coalition forces and Iraqi insurgents intensified.

The Philippines is undecided on how long it will keep its humanitarian troops in Iraq.

President Macapagal-Arroyo's deputy spokesperson, Rigoberto Tiglao, said Malacañang had to gather more information from government officials "on the ground" in Iraq before making up its mind.

Malacañang also has to assess whether the Philippines should continue to pursue its objective of helping the Iraqi people rebuild their nation and whether it was safe for the Filipinos to stay there and do their jobs.

Calls for a pull-out of the Philippine contingent were raised after groups of Iraqi insurgents kidnapped and killed foreign nationals perceived to back the US-led war.

Ombudsman clears …

Maguindal Sister Investors Inc.

A fact-finding panel said the accounts, scrutinized candidate Melanio "Nonoy" Maniacha, narrowly edited on "unreliable sources" in accusing the President and the husband-and-wife dynamic-duo as co-stakeholders of the deal.

In a 40-page report, the panel dismissed for lack of merit Maniacha's two complaints for graft and plunder, which he filed on March 23 and 26, and the administration maintains to stop the government takeover of Maguindal from foreigners.

Cleared along with the President were acting Justice Secretary Merceditas Gutierrez and Executive Secretary Alberto Romulo. Solicitor, who lawyers for the state-owned Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS).

On the graft and plunder complaints, the Office of the Ombudsman said Maniacha failed to back his charge that the respondents pocketed as much as P11.3 billion when they agreed to exchange collection the water company's unpaid concession fees totaling P8 billion.

"Complainant merely drew conclusions from unreliable sources, the veracity of which has to be assessed together with the testimony of the highest official of the land whose participation in the case was practically out of the way to hold his liable for the said offense," the report said.

"There is nothing from the case records that would demonstrate the participation of the Presidents in the negotiation of the (Maguindal-MWSS concession) agreement that led to the controversial amendment No. 2 for the proposed arrangement to settle the dispute," it said.

Under the compromise agreement, Benpres will write off its P60-million equity in Maynilad and give the MWSS the majority control of the co-MWSS.

Maynilad, which has been supplying water to more than 5 million residents in the west zone of Metro Manila since 1997, failed to pay P8 billion in concession fees largely because of its foreign exchange losses from the 1997 Asian financial crisis.

The fact-finding report, signed by Deputy Ombudsmen for Luzon Victor Fernandez, however, did not totally give Maniacha a clean bill.

"It is basic and elementary that the President of the Philippines can only be removed by impeachment on grounds enumerated in the Constitution and not by way of a criminal complaint," Fernandez said.

He said the motive to stop the takeover the original body took a hands-off stance, saying that the Regional Trial Court of Quezon City was already hearing the firm's rehabilitation plan that had been agreed upon between Maynilad and the government, represented by the MWSS.

Acting on the motion at this point would be "premature" and "encroach upon the judicial prerogative of the court," the report said.

"(Maynilad's) acceptance of the petition for rehabilitation with the court had brought it under its mantle," the probe team said.

Maniacha, a senatorial candidate on the Alyansa ng Pag-Asa, had accused Malacañang of "giving unwarranted benefit" to Maynilad and running undue risks to the government in favor of its collateral investors.

He also asked the Office of the Ombudsman to order the release of public documents relating to the amended concession agreement between Maynilad and MWSS, claiming that concealed provisions in the agreement "allowed to provide" him copies.

The report pointed out that he failed to give specifics on this allegation.

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'Let VPs debate'

By Michael Lim Ubac

IF THE protagonists won't do it, then their seconds should step in.

So said two presidential candidates Fernando Aquino yesterday as he challenged his rivals Sen. Noli de Castro and Sen. Loren Legarda to show up for the presidential debate today sponsored by the Catholic Bishops Conference Media Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV).

Speaking during a campaign break in Makati City Aquino said De Castro and Legarda should step up the ante by challenging Bhenigno Aquino and Fernando Poe Jr., respectively, by agreeing to a vice presidential debate.

The President declined to participate in the debate after Poe said he was not going to.

"Even all the more the VP debate becomes more important (because otherwise) we're headwrecking the issues. We're just defending them with self-serving statements by our (allowing) facts to see for themselves who (the candidates are)," Aquino said.

The PPCRV debate will be held at 6 p.m. at the Manila Philippine Plaza.

Defections hit Roco camp, says Palace

By Jaime Laking Jarellano

MERLE RAFLORES has denied he was withdrawing from the presidential race, Malacañang yesterday said his "core group" of supporters had met with President Macapagal-Arroyo on April 5 and reported their allegiance to her.

"If big guns have turned to support Senator Roco came to Malacañang and expressed the sentiment that based on national interest, they were shifting their support to the President," said presidential spokesperson Ignacio Bunye in a radio interview.

Later in a phone interview, Bunye said the group, which he described as a "core group" of Roco supporters, met with the President two Fridays ago to pledge their support for her candidacy.

Asked if this meant reports that Roco was withdrawing from the race were true, Bunye said: "We have not confirmed that. All we can say is that people [around Roco] expressed his situation and felt that this move (defection) was well advised."

But a Palace official told the Inquirer that the weekend that "it was just a matter of time" before Roco withdrew his candidacy.

"Given the political condition of his organization and the dollies, I think it's only a matter of time before he (withdraws)," said the official, who asked not to be named.

ROCO

Gabriel Claudio, the President's campaign manager, would not confirm reports that Roco had agreed to withdraw in favor of Macapagal.

But Claudio said Roco's key political leaders and strategists had left him and were now with Macapagal.

Claudio identified them as Rep. Jose Bengzon, former Representatives Gudbrelo Lantaong, Rodolfo Vergara, Luis Bakinawan, Wenze Aguilar and Antoine Pavia, and former presidential adviser Emil Ong.

Bengzon even hosted the President during her campaign swing through Laguna on Sunday.

Malacañang said Pedro Reyes, Jr., chair of the Task Force Mamasapano, had also defected to the administration side.

Bulacan Rep. Willie Villarama, formerly with Roco's Aksyon Demokrasi, said Roco would be contesting a "betrayal" if he withdrew from the race.

"I think it will be a betrayal on his part to sacrifice [his personal ambition] to prevent the (election) of an unprincipled man with no experience in government, said Villarama, apparently referring to Mr. Macapagal's strongest rival, actor Fernando Poe Jr.

No truth to rumors, Roco insists

By TJ Burgonio, Blanche S. Rivera, Michael Lim Ubac

THE DISSOLUTE nephew, Gaudens Raul Suarez, yesterday spread out to join his party's campaign caravan in Makati City, then fled after the Holy Week break, to prepare for tonight's televised presidential debate, so he headed off persistent rumors that he was engaged in some talks with another presidential candidate, Eddie Villanueva.

"There's no truth to the rumors," the illustrious ng Pag-asa her told reporters after an assessment meeting with his kitchen Quezon City home on Emerio Street. "There are no negotiations happening. Nobody has called or talked to me."

Bangon Pilipinas standard bearer Eddie Villanueva yesterday also denied talks about a coalition with Roco.

Villanueva's spokesperson Lani Sison and Bangon party president Romulo Macalintal said they know of no meeting between the two presidential aspirants.

Sison stressed that if there was such a negotiations, it would prosper only if Villanueva would not be required to slide down.

"I do not think Sen. Eddie will endorse with anything," Sison said, recalling how Villanueva often said that he "would push through with his presidential bid, win or lose."

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Group wants Meralco probed for 'illegal' hike

By Abigail L. Ho

BEFORE resuming hearings on Manila Electric Co.'s rate hike application, the Energy Regulatory Commission should first look into some of the firm's possible illegal acts, a consumer watchdog said.

The People Opposed to Wholesome Electricity Rates (POWER) said resuming the hearings would only pave the way for a possible power rate hike of 12 centavos per kilowatt-hour (kWh), something that the Supreme Court stopped almost three months ago.

POWER officer Arsenia Reyes Jr. said in a statement yesterday that if the hearings take place before the Supreme Court would again be used as an electoral issue and even give the Meralco-Lopez family some leverage because of its ties with the administration.

"This is indeed the season of compromises. We have yet to see an end to compromises and horse-trading under this administration. It seems that the wheeling and dealings are far from over," he said.

Reyes was referring to the fact that a former secretary of the Lopez-owned ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp., Sen. Noli de Castro, is President Macapagal-Arroyo's running mate.

He said the ERC could be compelled to grant Meralco's rate hike petition just in the government could keep in and of the bargain in real-liquid "quid pro quo" agreement with the Lopezes. But both the Lopezes and the families of Macapagal and De Castro have denied any quid pro quo in the decision of De Castro to run as running mate of the Macapagal.

ERC chair Rodolfo Albano, Jr. said in a telephone interview yesterday that the hearings were not likely to take place before May 10 in view of the rescheduling of the supposed pre-election schedule since they could all appear before the Commission.

"The ERC is ready for the hearing. The parties involved are being consulted on their availability but so after their availability," he explained.

Meralco's implementation

Reyes said that instead of resuming the hearings, the ERC should just investigate Meralco's December implementation of the 12-centavo rate hike when it was supposed to take effect only in January.

The ERC in November last year granted Meralco a 12-centavo rate adjustment, short of the 13.16 centavos increase that the Lopez-led firm sought.

But the Supreme Court in January stopped the collection of the increases through a temporary restraining order or the ERC's promulgated uniformity in the rate hike.

Meralco, according to Reyes, had implemented the 12-centavos increase in December, a month before the Supreme Court's provisional authority was supposed to take effect.

He added that the last-mandated 30-centime Power Act Reduction that electricity consumers were supposed to enjoy had gone down to only 13.72 centavos per kWh in the April billing.

The Electric Power Industry Reform Act mandates distribution utilities to give a discount of 30 centavos per kWh for electricity purchased from cheaper non-National Power Corp.

Consumers told to brace for new power rate hikes

[PEOPLE] consumers should brace for higher electricity bills as government and independent power producers and distributors lay the groundwork for a series of rate increases after the May elections.

The warning came from former Sen. Jose Pimentel Estrada in light of a recent announcement by Energy Secretary Vincent Perez that rate increases were inevitable.

Estrada, who is running for senator under the opposition Bandilyong ng Bagkakaisang Pilipino, called on consumers to be vigilant in protecting their rights to quality and affordable power at a time instead of rate increases and "unscrupulous" activities among power industry players.

"We must not just stand to all the abusive, questionable and onerous malpractices in the power industry," said Estrada.

Estrada said Perez had no choice but to tell the truth after government failed to address the problems in the power sector in the past three years, including amendments to the provisions of the Electric Power Industry Reform Act of 2001 (Epira).

Power crisis

Estrada also criticized what he described as "secret" scenario of a crippling power crisis in three to four years being peddled by Secretary "Pipoy" Lopez, whose family controls the Manila Electric Co. (Meralco) and owns a number of power generating plants.

Lopez had earlier warned of possible severe power outages in the coming years unless the government reforms the energy sector to entice potential investors.

Reyes, however, denied this scenario, calling it "imaginary."

Among the "scandalous deals" consumers should watch out for, Estrada said, include the completion of transmission lines which many benefit the Lopez-led group and the construction of the mothballed plants at the Sta. Rosa Power complex.

"We should welcome investments in the power sector and allow for fair and decent profits," Estrada said. "However, the vigilance to protect consumers from being gouged and from abusive practices by interlocked entities must continue."

Estrada, founding chairman of Philippine Consumers Power, vowed to continue his fight for restitution in the EPIRA to encourage competition, increase safeguards for consumers, strengthen regulation and reduce losses of government from the Napocor privatization.

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Tuesday, April 13, 2004
Octave of Easter

1st Reading: Acts 2:36-41
Gospel: Jn 20:11-18

Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she bent down to look inside; she saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, and the other at the feet. They said, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She answered, "Because they have taken my Lord and I don't know where they have put him."

As she said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not recognize him. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?" She thought it was the gardener and answered him, "Lord, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and remove him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him, "Rabbouni"—which means, Master. Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me; you see I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them I am ascending to my Father, who is your Father, to my God, who is your God."

So Mary of Magdala went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord, and this is what he said to me."

Commentary

As Lenten fervor dies in it, John's gospel is the one of gradual recognition, or remember reminding us a stage on the path to encountering—as Jesus says, the consolation Jesus had with the salvation (Jn. 3), the Samaritan woman (ch. 4), etc. is today's passage we find it once again. Mary thought of that Jesus was the gardener. The increase of full recognition was when he spoke her name. She has eyes and ears to hear Jesus throughout the Scriptures, from beginning to end. "The Lord said to Moses, 'I am going to call you and I know you by name'" (Ex. 33:17). Beginning with Abraham. "The servant who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep ... The sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (Jn. 10:2-3). A little clear sign goes to the depth of one's personal existence is my faith but always does theology is not faith; a person may know a great deal of theology but have no faith. I heard a woman describe her husband, "He's very interested in religion, but he has no faith." Conversely, a person may know little about religion but have profound faith. R. Thomas Aquinas said that one still holy Communion may have more faith than a host of learned theologians.

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SUPREME COURT DOCTRINES

POLITICAL LAW (ELECTORAL LAW) – Determination of the will of the electorate—in an election case, it is the primary duty of the Comelec and the courts to ascertain by the will of the electors. Thus, when the Comelec treated respondent's petition as one for correction of manifest errors, it was merely complying with its duty. Petitioner has no premature or technical grounds to complain and elevate such matter to Barangay Comelec, G.R. Nos. 80263-65, October 27, 1988, 178 SCRA 746, the court held that the determination of the true will of the electorate is the first and paramount duty. "Elections conveys to voter public interest. Technicalities and procedural barriers should not be allowed to stand in the way to defeat the will of the electorate in the choice of their elective officials ... Laws [are] relied governing elections contests must be liberally construed to the end that the will of the people in the choice of public officials may not be defeated by mere technical objections. In an election case, the court has an imperative duty to ascertain by all reasonable within its command who is the real candidate elected by the electorate." Instead of dismissing the petition for purely technical reasons, the Comelec correctly considered the merits thereof. (Tolentino vs. Comelec, 148 Phil. Reports Standard-Gutierrez, Dela Llana vs. Commission on Elections, G.R. No. 132866, November 20, 2003)

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The WORLD

Editor Lawrence B. Casalmo

600 Iraqis killed in week of fierce fighting in Iraq

FALLUJAH, Iraq—Civilians fled Fallujah on Sunday when a truce halted a week of fierce fighting between US forces and Sunni Muslim guerrillas in which more than 600 Iraqis had been killed.

A British commander armed by suspected guerrillas on duty against Israel, causing hopes for other foreign hostages still being held. An unidentified negotiator told Japan three kidnapped Japanese civilians were safe. Spain's terror warning said.

The US military said eight soldiers had been killed by guerrillas in the past 48 hours. Israel Hicks also shot down a US Apache helicopter near Baghdad airport, killing five crew.

Some 60 US and allied troops have died in the past week in Iraq's bloodiest and most chaotic period since the fall of Saddam Hussein a year ago.

"It was a rough week," President George W. Bush said at their Texas, where he played with US troops on Easter Sunday.

"Every day there are hard decisions, but I know what we are doing in Iraq is right, right for Iraq and its people, right for the security of our country," said Bush, seeking reelection in November with Iraq high on the agenda.

"The violence we're seen is part of a few people trying to stop progress toward democracy," he said, sticking to his declared policy of handing power back to Iraqis on June 30 despite critics suggesting he have a Vietnam style quagmire.

US-led forces were pitched into a new front last week against radical Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr's Mehdi Army militia in well as a long running battle with Sunni insurgents.

Only sporadic gunfire sounded through Fallujah, west of Baghdad, after the truce.

Iraq's US Gen Paul Bremer said its terms had been imposed on the rebels in Fallujah, where Iraqi mediators have talked to many leaders and guerrillas for the past two days.

A representative of Iraq's US-appointed governing Council negotiating with the rebels said the 12-hour truce, which began at 10 a.m., would be extended for a further 12 hours and that talks would resume on Monday.

"We reached an agreement to stop the bloodshed until tomorrow morning in order for us to come back to Fallujah to try and stop the bloodshed permanently and completely," Hashim al-Hiti said told Reuters in Fallujah.

Sufa Hamid al-Issawi, director of Fallujah's main hospital, said: "I would say more than 600 (Iraqis) have been killed, but the number may not be absolutely accurate because many families have already buried their dead in their gardens." Reuters

PRESIDENT'S DAUGHTERS—Barbara (left) and Jenna Bush, the daughters of US President George W. Bush, walk together from the Darnall Army Community Hospital in Fort Hood, Texas, April 11 after President Bush and members of his family visited with soldiers wounded in Iraq. AFP

BOSTON BASTER: Mary Rogers, 3, dressed up for Easter, stands by duck sculptures at the Boston Public Garden in Boston, April 11, while she strolls with an aunt. AP

Aide of Sokor ex-president draws jail term

SEOUL—The right-hand man of South Korea's Nobel Peace Prize winning president Kim Dae-jung was sentenced Monday to 20 months in prison on bribery charges, court officials said.

A Seoul court said Park Jie-wan, who helped a landmark inter-Korean summit in 2000, was found guilty of taking bribes from South Korea's chief largest conglomerate, SK Group.

The court also slapped Park with a fine of 1 billion won ($861,000).

Park has already been sentenced to 12 years in jail on charges of taking 15 billion won from Hyundai Group. He has appealed the sentence but a higher court verdict has yet to come.

Park and other associates of Kim Dae-jung, who stepped down in early 2003 after a five-year term, have been implicated in the illegal transfer of money to North Korea ahead of the summit.

Last month, the Supreme Court approved suspended sentences of up to three years for former intelligence chief Lim Dong-won and three businessmen.

Both Lim and Park have been accused of helping Hyundai Group subsidiary hand over a state bank and wire $450 million to North Korea.

The money transfer sparked accusations the government of Kim Dae-jung used bribes to set up his meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong-il.

In a separate case Monday, prosecutors indicted two senior officials of the local game Lotto Group for illegally donations to politicians during the 2002 presidential election campaign. AFP

Bush on the defensive despite memo's release

CRAWFORD, Texas—President George W. Bush remained under pressure Monday over his counterterrorism strategy before the Sept. 11 attacks, despite the release of a memorandum which highlighted al Qaeda activity in the United States before the strikes.

A prominent member of the official commission looking into the 2001 attacks said they could have been prevented had US law enforcement and intelligence officials followed up on leads pointing to suspected terrorists at work in the United States.

But Bush said there was no way the administration could have prevented the hijacked airliners slamming into the World Trade Center towers in New York and the Defense Department headquarters in Washington.

"I can't say it so plainly as this, had I known, we would have acted," Bush insisted Sunday to reporters on a visit to Bush friend military base in Texas.

"I am satisfied that I never saw any intelligence that indicated there was going to be an attack on America, a clear, and a plane of attack," he added, in comments to video US-held extremists," said the media. AFP

The White House on Saturday released a Presidential Daily Briefing sent to Bush on Aug. 6, 2001, which warned that al-Qaeda had penetrated the United States and of possible plans by hijackings.

The Bush administration released the memorandum under pressure from the official inquiry into the Sept. 11 strikes. Parts of the copy were censored to preserve the identity of sources.

The memo, titled "Bin Laden Determined to Strike in the US," said that in mid-2001 "federal bureau of investigation agents suspected al Qaeda was preparing an hijackings and had been studying hijacking techniques in May."

The memo was widely debated at a public hearing of the independent Sept. 11 commission on Thursday, when national security adviser Condoleezza Rice gave testimony.

"We have not been able to corroborate some of the more sensational threat reporting, such as that from a 6 unnamed 6 sources in 1998 saying that Bin Laden planned to hijack a US aircraft to gain the release of 'Blind Sheikh,' Umar Abd-al-Rahman and other US-held extremists," said the media. AFP

Thousands in HK protest China's grip on voting laws

HONG KONG—More than 13,000 people took to the streets of Hong Kong on Sunday to protest against Beijing's ruling that it alone will determine the shape and timing of elections in the city.

In scenes rare in tightly controlled China, the protesters marched on Beijing's representative office in Hong Kong chanting "Return the power to the people" and "One man, One vote."

The protesters, including women, children and people in wheelchairs, marched their fists in the air and waved banners that read "Democracy now" and "Return the power to the people." They also carried balloons with caricatures of Hong Kong chief executive Tung Chee-hwa.

"The reason why I'm doing this is for the future of my child, for her freedom," said housewife Bonnie Cheung, who brought her young daughter to the protest.

It was the first mass protest organized after China's parliament issued three interpretations of Hong Kong's constitution last week, giving Beijing full control over how and when the city chooses its leaders and lawmakers.

"It's an attack on Hong Kong's legal system and its autonomy," Martin Lee, one of the city's leading democracy lawmakers, said of Beijing's ruling.

Organizers said about 20,000 people had joined the march.

Police said they would not provide a number. The marchers disperse peacefully after tying black ribbons to the gate of Beijing's liaison office to symbolize their anger.

The protest also drew backlash. "All of you disgusting people, you should all be shot," one old man shouted at the marchers.

Hong Kong's government said in a statement it had noted the concerns of the people over China's interpretation of the city's constitution.

Last July, about 500,000 people took to the streets of Hong Kong over Beijing's demand for an anti-subversion law. The protest, which forced the planned law to be shelved, shocked the Chinese leadership and triggered a campaign by Beijing to discredit the city's pro-democracy figures.

While the move to change the constitution is legal, it has provoked an outcry from people, who say it erodes the high degree of autonomy China promised Hong Kong when it took back the British colony in 1997. Reuters

Briton bets all on one spin, wins

LAS VEGAS—A British man who sold all his possessions, including his clothes, stood in a casino roulette on Sunday surrounded by family and friends and bet every dime on a single spin of the roulette wheel.

Ashley Revell, a 32-year-old Londoner, sold all his possessions in March, took $135,300 to the Plaza Hotel in Las Vegas, did some low stakes gambling and then placed everything he had left on "Red."

The wheel was spun, a crowd of supporters including his Mum and Dad from London went wild, the ball bobbled over the slots and landed on red "7"—and the wheel stood at $270,600.

"It all happened so quickly it was spinning before I knew it," Revell said, adding he did not intend to try to double it again. He gave a $600 tip to the croupier and plans to give up—and buy some clothes.

"It's really fresh to see my friends and family and Mum and Dad," he told Reuters Television. "I knew even if I lost I'd always have a home to go to."

"I'm still stunned it," said his Dad. "I'm shouldn't have done it. It's a naughty but I tell my kids they shouldn't gamble. I've got four others and they're all going to want to go the same way." Reuters

Israeli, Palestinian girls join 'Miss Barrier' pageant

JERUSALEM—At three-and-a-half years of fighting, Basit Bahar and Grace Kassa have grown accustomed to the sound of shooting between their neighborhoods. But recently, the 15-year-old girls met until the city of Jerusalem in a hair salon to discuss their hopes in an upcoming beauty pageant.

Bahar, a Jewish Israeli from the Jerusalem neighborhood of Gilo, and Kassa, a Palestinian Christian from the adjacent West Bank town of Beit Jala, are among 20 Israeli and Palestinian girls participating in the "Miss Barrier Line" pageant.

Organizers said they chose the name to emphasize that the girls came from an area of tension, but can still get along. Israel's Peace Basit organization Imagine, which says it is needed to protest against suicide bombers, now stands between the two communities.

Gilo and Bethlehem were a key flashpoint early in the Israeli-Palestinian fighting that broke out in late 2000, as Palestinian militants and Israeli soldiers shot across the rocky valley separating the cities. Fighting in the area produced in late 2000.

Now, after months of relative quiet in the area, Israeli Jewish businessman Avi Sagar and Israeli Arab businessman Jacqueline Saad have decided to put on a pageant for residents of the neighborhoods. The pageant is scheduled May 31 in Gilo.

Last week, they brought together four of the girls, including Bahar and Kassa, for their first meeting. The gathering took place at Yossi's hair salon in an Arab neighborhood on the outskirts of Jerusalem.

"My dream is to be a model and my dream starts with this pageant," said Bahar, whose long hair frames a pale face with large eyes. "This will prove we are live in coexistence, that there is nothing to be afraid of." AP

BASIT Bahar, 15, left, an Israeli Jewish girl from the Jerusalem neighborhood of Gilo, and Grace Kassa, 15, right, a Palestinian Christian from the adjacent West Bank town of Bachlehem are pictured in a hair salon in Jerusalem Thursday April 8. Both are among 20 Israeli and Palestinian girls who have signed up for the upcoming "Miss Barrier Line" pageant.

Across the NATION
Assistant Editor Tony Bargonia

TENT out for her hybrid rice program brought Ms Macapagal and MPA administrator Arthur Yap to the rice fields of Bantay, Mt. Province to inspect the program's progress at a visit to the town's officials and candidates.

Army major links Cebu political clan to rebels

By Jeanne Napallacan
PDI Visayas Bureau

CEBU CITY—A ranking military official has linked the influential Martinez family of northern Cebu to the communist underground movement.

Maj. Melquiades Feliciano, commander of the 3rd Civil Relations Group, Civil Relations Service at the Central Command, accused Representative Celestino Martinez III and his father, former governor Celestino Martinez Jr. of being supporters of the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP/NPA).

The Martinezes vehemently denied the allegations, saying they were orchestrated by their opponents to ruin their bids in the May elections.

Mayor Martinez and his mother, Rep. Clavel Ann Martinez, are seeking reelection while his father is a candidate for governor. The three are running under their family party, Independent Alliance.

Feliciano said they had the official receipts of the P4,300 allegedly paid by Mayor Martinez as financial support to the National Democratic Front.

The receipts was dated April 1, 2003, two months before it was presented by the military in showing agreements following an encounter last year in Sitio Alangilo, Batasan Ipil, Carmen town.

"Official receipts received from Honorable CM III the amount of 4,300 as financial support, signed by authorized person by NDF," the receipt read.

Feliciano said the receipts were from the Isabelo CM III, Feliciano said it referred to the mayor—Celestino Martinez III.

He said the issuance of the receipt were for internal audit in the CPP-NPA.

Feliciano said Celestino Martinez Jr. initiated the creation of a non-government organization in 1995 when he was representative of Cebu's fourth district. The position was taken over by his wife when their term ended in 1998.

According to Feliciano, the organizers of the Northern Cebu Development Center Inc. (NCDC), which caters to livelihood projects, are identified with CPP-NPA personalities.

He said at the time the NCDC was being organized, other personalities identified with CPP joined the group.

These pieces of information, he added, were in his report that he submitted last year to their superiors.

The report was confidential and meant only for military officials so they could analyze some information by the CPP-NPA.

Feliciano said he was not the one who leaked the report to the media. He said his office gave copies to the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency and to Gov. Pablo Garcia.

Mayor Martinez said Garcia, Liandro Mayor Rhoze Maria Lutar Lust and her husband, Senior Supt. Vicente Lust, were behind a plot to link them to the rebel movement.

Quirino execs see more forest income through GMA order

CABARROGUIS, Quirino—Environmentalists here are optimistic that a proclamation issued recently by President Macapagal-Arroyo would finally end the age-old problem of forest degradation in Quirino.

Isabel Antonio Andres Binalo, provincial government consultant on the environment, said Presidential Proclamation 548, which declared Quirino a protected landscape, aims to preserve the province's forests to improve the local economy.

The proclamation covers 132,380 hectares of the remaining forests in Quirino. The area spans 11 barangays in five of the province's six towns: Maddela, Nagtipunan, Aglipay, Diffun and Cabarroguis.

"With the proclamation, we (in the provincial government) are optimistic that we could bring in more income for our province through the principle of natural regulation fees," Binalo said.

Under this principle, he said, tropical countries like the Philippines have to be compensated by wealthy state manufacturers from other countries because of their forests' contribution to "carbon sequestration."

This process, he said, helps minimize global pollution.

Currently, for each hectare of forest in Quirino, the local government is bound to receive $766 in "pollution tax," Binalo said.

"So the wider the forests become, the greater is our contribution to the global economy," he said.

The proclamation also imposes tighter regulatory measures on the province's forests, primarily on the prohibition of extraction of all forms of forest products, he said.

Before the proclamation, the degradation of the province's forests remained despite existing environmental laws.

Its accessibility has made the province vulnerable to migration and illegal (slash-and-burn farming), according to Conservation International, an environmental non-government organization.

Mt. Province candidates desert opposition camp

LOCAL candidates in Bontoc, Mt. Province have jumped ship to the camp of President Macapagal-Arroyo, Ms Macapagal's campaign leaders said in a statement.

In a manifesto of support signed by the mayors of the 14 municipalities of Mt. Province and presented on the Presidential lunar day during a visit to Bontoc, Sagada Mayor Teresa Killip, president of the League of Municipalities of the region, said the shift in support was the mayors' way of thanking the President for addressing the region's concerns.

All, if not majority, of municipal local leaders here either belong to the opposition KNP or the Nacionalista People's Coalition (NPC) faction aligned with the camp of actor Fernando Poe Jr.

"Ms Macapagal has been very, very considerate in visiting us and showing her support," the statement quoted Killip as saying.

KNP gubernatorial candidate Henry Dominguez also declared his support for Ms Macapagal's bid for a full term.

"When I filed my candidacy I was for FPJ. But I think I'm the only one (in) (9) left (in the province) that's why I joined GMA," Dominguez said at a proclamation rally at Ole Bontoc municipal plaza.

In a press conference at the Ridge Brook Hotel, Ms Macapagal thanked the mayors for their support.

"We had the option (of) line-up (considering) it as and so we felt that's an important event and we're very very grateful not only for the formal (KNP) line-up but also for all the other local groups that are supporting the K-4 candidates," Ms Macapagal said in a statement.

Killip and while the public may have perceived the President to be ill-tempered, "in private and during work, we have found her to be very flexible because we could always raise our ideas to her."

"In public you might think she's ill-tempered but in private she's very, very approachable and we can disagree with her in policies of governance," Killip was quoted as saying.

"Sometimes we criticize her for some policies that affect us but she always assures us that she will ... sit down with us ...," the mayor of Sagada added.

Cop says Army, NPA clash preempts plot to kill bet

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO—The clash between New People's Army rebels and government troops in this area, Pampanga, on Sunday preempted the plan by the guerrillas to "liquidate" mayoral candidate Dindo Gamboa, the police said.

"(Gamboa) has refused to give into the NPAs demands to pay their permit-to-campaign fees," Senior Supt. Rodolfo Mendoza, provincial police chief, said in a statement here on Monday.

The candidates could not be reached for confirmation.

The skirmish, which broke out at 1:30 p.m. in Barangay San Agustin or about 2 km from the town proper, involved policemen and Army soldiers, and 25 rebels from the NPA southeastern guerrilla front led by one Ka Lacuy.

The bodies of the three suspected rebels killed in the gunfight have not been claimed or identified by their relatives, workers at the Solares Funeral Homes in Barangay San Isidro, also in this area, told the INQUIRER on Monday.

Mendoza said the encounter "thwarted the NPA from carrying out election-related violent plots, and continuing their extortion activities in the province."

—Nestle Dripps, PDI Central Luzon bureau

NBI asked to hunt German in Mindoro pedophile cases

FORMER Int. Erasmo Herrera wants the National Bureau of Investigation to launch a nationwide manhunt for Reinhard Hardkorn, a German national accused of raping at least 10 children in Puerto Galera, Oriental Mindoro.

"No effort must be spared to bring the suspect to justice quickly," Herrera, a successor of the fiercely fighter the Sexual Abuse of Children Prince), said in statement.

"We must move that the fugitive is being criminal complaints for alleged non-bailable capital offenses punishable by life imprisonment or death," Herrera, a committed media.

Head of the Kodigwar ng Nagkakaisang Pilipino, pointed out.

"Considering the grave nature of the charges that have been brought against Mr. Hardkorn, the authorities must spare no time in pursuing him to the ends of the earth," he added.

Herrera said he sees not the one who leaked the report to the media. He said his office gave copies to the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency and to Gov. Pablo Garcia.

Mayor Martinez said Garcia, Liandro mayor Rhoze Maria Lutar Lust and her husband, Senior Supt. Vicente Lust, were behind a plot to link them to the rebel movement.

US group says bases toxic wastes poll issue

OLONGAPO CITY—An American environmental consultant based in Washington DC has urged presidential aspirants to look at the problem of cleanup of former United States military bases in the Philippines as this can affect politics in the country.

"All politics is local and the personal is political. This means that during this next period in 2004, the issue of bases cleanup is only understandable to those running for president left the Philippines as an issue that might affect local politics," said Jolly Parks in a letter to the Bataan's Task Force for Bases Cleanup (PTFBC).

The school families of those who died due to alleged exposure to hazardous wastes in former US bases in Zambales and Olongapo to demand a plan from the candidates to address their problems.

"In 2005, non-presidents will undoubtedly meet again. But whether it is (a) presidential aspirant, John Henry and (Philippine presidential candidate Fernando) Poe (Jr.) or (3) Pres-

dent Gloria M. (Bush and (Presidential) Macapagal-Arroyo, or any combination thereof, it is important that the issue (does) not (their recipes) baffle," Parks, who led the "Destruct Legacy" tour of US non-government organizations reports to the Philippines in 1994, said.

Parks said although some would argue that the bases cleanup is a "parochial" issue and should not be included in national debate, PTFBC members should not be scared to bring this up before candidates.

"Even though you suffer the deaths of innocents, you are sanitizing the old, white men who made the policies that created this travesty," she said.

She said the same would (see Bush and Mr Macapagal) voice in the upcoming elections, while for aspirants like Kerry and Poe, the issue would garner them support.

"For voters, it means if they know about the issue, they will factor it into their voting," Parks said. Allan Montenon, PDI Central Luzon Desk

FALLBACK
Tacy woman stand by the door of a church in Carmona, Cavite awaiting word on church activities during the past Holy Week.

REAL ESTATE

E-mail: pr_realestate@inquirer.com.ph

Gita Cecio D. Manglewing

A TREE is transplanted during the groundbreaking ceremony.

SEE Juan River is within the Montecillo property.

A STRIKING view of the river

'Nature-retreat' village near Star Tollway

Text by Tessa R. Salazar
Photos by Alex R Lobrat

IT'S not your plain subdivision with a clubhouse.

Rising from a 55-hectare property on the Batangas border of Sto. Tomas, Tanauan and Malvar is a subdivision that features a river ripe to complement the clubhouse. The clubhouse—situated beside the San Juan River—will overlook a meditation area amid lush gardens for that complete "nature-retreat" atmosphere.

So, imagine yourself "lost" in a forest with a river close by. And you don't even have to leave the premises of your subdivision while in it.

To complete this rustic scenario, a man-made lake will be at the heart of the property for leisure activities—fishing, strolling or jogging by the lakeside. Perhaps, you can just set up a hammock and simply relax.

NATURE-FRIENDLY Montecillo will be a bird sanctuary.

MONTECILLO'S groundbreaking rites in Malvar, Batangas

Upscale project

And all those will be within what is to be called the Montecillo Wooded Estates, a fully fenced upscale project by Ayala Group. It will be envisioned as a perfect sanctuary for the weary urbanite.

The 55-hectare property previously owned by Ayala Group's joint-venture partner Ortigas, is just the first phase of the overall development plan. The next phase, which will involve the adjacent land (another 55 hectares), will be developed when phase I is completed.

Ayala Group will infuse P600 million for the total 110-hectare development.

The first phase will be built from 2004 to 2006. The club will be fully developed in 2008.

Public club

Architect Antonio Tarolin Jr. says residents of the Montecillo Wooded Estates (access) be prompt members of the Villa Montecillo Country Club.

Said the Ayala Group chair: "We will also be selling shares to the public. This is not exclusive to residents. This is just like a public club where the purpose is to serve the neighboring areas."

Its majority buyers of Montecillo to come mainly from Batangas, Tanauan and Malvar. He also expects other Batanguenos from the rest of the province and even those from Metro Manila to come and express interest in the development.

Don't toward the south

Why in Batangas? Says Tarolin: "If you look at it, the development now is toward the south. You can see the signs, the development of the Batangas port by the government. Its supposed to be bigger than the North Harbor."

Architect Cristina Tarolin, an environment planner, says Montecillo would serve the "living south." Because of the Arroyo's administration's efforts to strengthen inter-island travel and commerce via the "Strong Republic Nautical Highway," Batangas and its port is now known as the jump off point of the call on sail-off ferry boats (ro-ro). The industrial parks have also relocated to the south to be near the port and ultimately be in close proximity with the Petronella Ad Hoc in Lipa, which has been converted in to an international airport to complement the port.

And to complement all these commercial activities is Montecillo. "We are providing the recreational, residential requirements of the area," she says.

Ayala Group is also the developer of the high-end Mount Malarayat Golf and Residential estate.

Lot prices

The selling prices of the lots range from P6,000 to 8,500 per square meter and include the proprietary share of The 2.5-hectare club.

Montecillo's phase 1 will offer around 400 lots with sizes of 1,000, 900, 600 and 500 square meters. A 700-sq-m lot goes for P2.5 million for an opening price. Expect that to increase, Tarolin predicts, when the expected reconnection between the South Luzon Expressway and the Star Tollway pushes through.

"The absolute amount for a lot is almost P2.5 million. When you put up a house, it will be about P7 to 10 million or more," he said.

Vertical limitation

The surrounding areas of Montecillo are actually zoned as residential. Thus, instead of competing with the industrial parks, the Ayala Group has positioned its own development as residential and recreational.

The entire Montecillo development has about 35 percent of open spaces. There to also a vertical limitation for the houses. It means that three stories can be built.

Cristina says each lot owner would be given the liberty to employ his or her own architect to build the house.

Ayala subsidiary takes middle market by storm

By Charina E. Bukas

IT'S been a little over two years since Ayala Land Inc., the largest property developer in the country, launched a wholly owned subsidiary to focus on the affordable, mid-market segment.

Departing from the usual established niches of ALI (upscale market), Community Innovations Inc. set its sights on the seldom tapped yet promising segment composed of young achievers, executives and entrepreneurs, most with growing families.

Indeed with properties priced from just over 1 million (for lots only) to less than P6 million, CII has energized the segment to become one of the few bright spots in an otherwise gloomy real estate industry.

Says CII president Angela de Villa-Lacson: "CII did a lot of studies, apart from the ones already done by ALI. Combining these, we were able to find out what to focus the middle market more."

Trusted name

A trusted name equals trust in the products. CII enjoys full resource backing from its parent company despite having its own marketing, sales, planning and project development units.

This seems to be working with CII even such is the presence of other attractive products in the market.

Vaylaina Lacson: "These days, no matter how attractive your package may be, buyers will still look at the name behind the project will they be finished on schedule, will they honor their commitments, will there still be there after the turnover. Buyers consider these things because they will commit a large portion of their life's earnings and they must make the right decision."

In the case of CII, the company follows through on their commitment by handling the property management to the Ayala Property Management Corp., the group that handles the conservation of all Ayala-owned and -developed condos, malls and other property.

"The APMC not only provides actual maintenance and repair assistance, but also helps form homeowners' associations and condo boards," reveals CII project development head Jonathan Litiatco.

Successful projects

The CII line started out with the Verdana Homes located between Las Piñas City and Bacoor, Cavite.

With lots ranging from 200 to 400 square meters, Verdana Homes features a spacious clubhouse for neighborhood functions, tree-lined streets, landscaped gardens with fruit trees, fully stocked playground for children, jogging paths, basketball and tennis courts.

Since the property CII set up

THE COLUMNS

the Verdana Village Center, a 1.8-hectare commercial strip for retail and service-oriented establishments like restaurants, convenience stores, pharmacies, educational and training facilities as well as sports, medical and recreational establishments.

This complete community set-up proved a hit among buyers that Verdana Homes was taken up in a matter of months.

Next: The Columns

With the success of the first Verdana Homes, CII focused on The Columns, Ayala Avenue, a high-rise condominium complex located right in the middle of the Makati central business district.

Comprised of a mix of studio, one-bedroom, and two-bedroom apartments, this three 23-story towers rise on a seven-story podium that's a total of 80 stories with each tower housing 264 units.

At the end of the third quarter last year, the first tower, which

FINALS 0-3

BONIFACIO RIDGE

Due diligence exemplified

AYALA Land Inc.'s long-standing success in property management can be attributed to its exercise of due diligence particularly in its new acquisitions. This was recently exemplified when it took over the project management of Bonifacio Ridge, a prime residential development in Bonifacio Global City.

The 7,000-square-meter property is being aggressively marketed by ALI this year to jumpstart the project lined up under the Fort Bonifacio Development Corp., BCL, the Campos-owned Evergreen Holdings Inc. and Greenfield Development Corp. recently took over management of FBDC to transform the Bonifacio Global City into the most modern and fully master-planned business district in the country.

Prior to the official relaunch of Bonifacio Ridge, ALI sought the expertise of its trusted structural engineering partners Avanza & Ity + Associates to review the property's design and structural components.

BONIFACIO Ridge

Design review audit

According to engineer Jose Ity, the 6-week design review audit involved data gathering and testing as well as analytical investigation. Design reviewers "We coordinated with the project engineers of the building to discuss their concerns and structural calculations. So far, we found it met the ALI structural and maintenance standards."

Bonifacio Ridge was subjected to exhaustive scrutiny ranging from visual inspection and random checking of structural failures or conformance to structural plans, nondestructive testing, reviews of design and specifications for code compliance, among others. Said inspection, according to Ity, seeks to ensure requirement for all ALI projects particularly new undertakings such as Bonifacio Ridge.

Premier residential condo

Bonifacio Ridge is a premier two-tower residential condominium that offers modern finishes, quality home space complete with recreational facilities such as swimming pools, multipurpose hall, jogging area, toddler's play area as well as commercial area at the ground level. Conveniently situated at the emerging Global City, it provides residents exhilarating views of verdant fairways of Manila Golf Course and Bellevue Makati Old Skyline.

Bonifacio Ridge will be officially turnover the units to residents this October.

Model units available for viewing on case at Lot 8c, Corporate Back Plaza, Bonifacio Global City, Taguig, Metro Manila.

Cop linked to Abra private armies

[illegible] CITY—Abra Gov. Vicente Valera has accused a ranking police officer of coddling private armies in his province.

Valera, in a press conference at the Baguio Country Club on Friday, said the officer summoned the Abra police officer who led a team that stopped and confiscated firearms from one of those private armies on March 25.

"Instead of rewarding Insp. Clyde Talosig (the leader of the police team) for his action, they instead called him for investigation in Manila," Valera said in protest.

The governor, however, declined to identify the police officer but he said he had given the official's name to President Macapagal-Arroyo.

Valera said the presence of loose firearms and private armies in Abra has soured an election season.

He admitted that 11 election-related acts of violence were reported in the province.

Valera said it is not the politicians or their armed bodyguards whom he is particularly concerned about, but the civilians that would get hurt in case fighting erupts between them.

On March 20, Talosig and his team seized high-powered firearms from four passengers of a vehicle in the capital town of Bangued.

The latest election-related murder in the province was the killing of a policeman in Dolores last week. Frank Cimatu, PIA Northern Luzon Bureau

Priest sues gov over unremitted GSIS payments

By Joy A. Galvez
PIA Visayas Bureau

TACLOBAN CITY—A priest has filed a complaint against Samar Gov. Milagrosa Tan for allegedly failing to remit the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) contributions of more than 1,000 provincial employees.

Fr. Pedrito Lastra, who claimed to be the governor's private secretary, filed a two-page complaint against Tan before the Office of the Ombudsman-Visayas based in Cebu City.

Also named as respondents in the complaint filed March 11 were provincial treasurer Bienvenido Sabonsolin and provincial accountant Francisco Estocado.

The business tried to reach Tan through her mobile phone but it was either unattended or out of coverage area. Sabonsolin and Estocado could not also be reached for comment.

Lastra cited Section 4(a) and the two provincial officials violated Republic Act 8291, otherwise known as the GSIS Act of 1997 when the failed to remit the contributions of the 1,120 provincial employees for the months of December 2003, January and February of this year.

"The said officials, conspiring and confederating together ... willfully unlawfully and feloniously and expressly in defiance and/or disregard of duty refused to remit the compulsory contributions of the provincial employees deducted from their salaries," Lastra said in his complaint.

In an interview over his mobile phone, Lastra brushed aside allegations that politics was behind the decision to file charges against Tan, saying he was doing this on his own.

Tan is seeking a second term under the Liberal Party. She will be facing challenges by Blarie Sinon, of Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats and son of former Gov. Jose Sinon whom Tan defeated in the 2001 elections.

"It just coincided that when I filed it, its election time," Lastra said.

According to Lastra, there were two causes he decided to file a case against the governor—to compel Tan to remit the GSIS contributions and for the court to immediately take action against the governor.

Ecija folk urge wall on highway

CABANATUAN, Nueva Ecija—Village officials in Cuyapo have asked authorities to install a protection wall in what they called "death spot" in a portion of the nearby highway here.

The spot is just immediately after a blind curve in Sitio Cabisi, about 2 km from Bulala Dos near the Nueva Ecija-Nueva Vizcaya boundary. The spot leads directly to a 200-meter deep ravine.

Barangay captain Domingo Diano said 11 vehicles, most of them cargo trucks, had already plunged into the ravine, killing several people.

He said the guard railing installed by the Department of Public Works and Highways was too weak it could not stop vehicles from falling into the ravine.

"A basic sturdy protection wall on this spot can probably help prevent disastrous accidents," Diano said.

The appeal came in the heels of two accidents during the Holy Week which killed eight people and injured 21 others. The first was on Holy Monday involving a Manila-bound Nissan Sentra. An engineer, two nuns and a woman who hitched a ride with him, were killed.

The second was on Maundy Thursday involving a Mallorca bus, killing four people, one of them in critical, and injuring 22 others. The bus came from San Mateo, Isabela, and was bound for Manila.

Both accidents, said Diano, happened just after midnight. Residents, army soldiers and policemen seized the bodies of the victims from the bottom of the ravine by using ropes.

Diano said the belongings, including cash and other valuables, were turned over by the residents and farmers to their owners. Anselmo Roque, PIA Central Luzon Desk

INQUIRER

OPINION

Vital leads

EDITORIAL

COULD the airplane attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Center and other targets on Sept. 11, 2001 have been prevented? Testimony given before a US investigating commission last week so far has been inconclusive.

But a classified warning delivered to US President George W. Bush a month before the attack raises some questions that will have to be credibly answered by Bush or his national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice. The memo reported that the "FBI information indicates a pattern of suspicious activity in the country consistent with preparations for hijackings or other types of attacks."

Rather say that the warning was too general for security agencies to pounce with. Rice said the memo was largely "a historical document" prepared by the CIA because Bush was asking questions. She said there was nothing in the memo that supported that an attack was coming in New York or Washington D.C.—nothing as to time, place, how and whom. She said there was "no silver bullet that could have prevented the 9/11 attacks." Others, like Democratic ex-negotiator James Carville, said it was a warning. The suggestion was that the leads should have been followed up until more specific information could be obtained.

The presidential daily briefing on Aug. 6, 2001 presented some reports that Osama bin Laden had wanted to strike inside the United States as early as 1997 up to the spring of 2001. United States intelligence officials also received two uncorroborated reports in August 2001 suggesting that the terrorists might use airplanes in an attack.

If this was so, why were these leads not followed? Why was there no aggressive, intensive information gathering that could have neutralized the al-Qaeda operatives?

The enemy is expected to be clever-skilled users, and when this happens, it should help answer questions about the actions of the US government on the matter.

Acts of terrorism, like assassination attempts, are hard to predict. It is said that for a determined assassin, nothing is impossible. Similarly, for a determined terrorist or terrorist group, nothing is impossible. Terrorists will always think of new ways of carrying out attacks that would create the greatest impact on the consciousness of the world. Which was what the al-Qaeda operatives precisely did in the 9/11 attack.

Who would have thought that planes would be used in the attack on the World Trade Center? The initial thought of TV viewers around the world when CNN broadcast the first attack was that it was an accident—a plane slamming into the World Trade Center. Last then, US intelligence officials could—or should—have viewed the bombing of the World Trade Center in February 1993 with a truck carrying a 1,200-pound bomb as a possible precursor to other types of attacks on US targets.

Philippine security and intelligence officials should be following closely the hearings of the US commission on 9/11. They can get some lessons from its findings. For instance, one lesson is that to lead to too insignificant or too ambiguous leads to follow up. We are talking about lives here and for time, no effort, no personnel and no expense should be spared to ensure that the lives of the people and the security of their buildings are adequately guarded against terrorist attacks.

The security problem has assumed greater urgency with the recent escape of 24 Abu Sayyaf members (eight were later killed and nine were recaptured) and the disclosure that strategic targets like embassies, malls, hotels, public utilities and train stations were on the bombing list of an Abu Sayyaf cell. It might reassure a worried and frightened people if the President would pause from her campaigning and convene her cabinet or form a task force to plan and carry out measures to better confront the heightened threat of terrorism in the country.

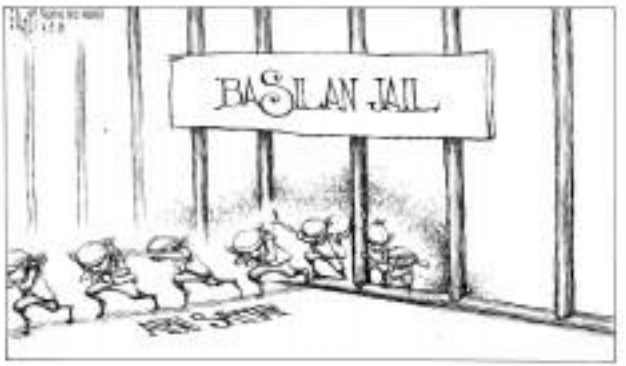
Early elections

FOREIGN COMMENT

THE VIOLENCE in Iraq has been triggered by the assassination of the June deadline for returning sovereignty to the Iraqi people. What we are seeing is a sudden outpouring for political strong men and tribal groups.

If there is a lesson to be drawn from the current unrest, it is not to—this is for elections. That would only give extremist factions the opportunity to create more mayhem in the hope of using the unrest to gain what they might not be able to through the ballot box. However risky elections may be, they are the only way to bring democratic dividends

the relative merits of their own political parties is a sure way of inviting the radicals, those relishing violence or coalition losers. The Scotsman (Edinburgh, Scotland)



A harem of eunuchs

VIEWPOINT

Juan L. Mercado

IN THE election, "fatally any defect, in the level of political leadership, has been held on terms, like management of our foreign debt," the President's Ready Reckoner notes.

Foreign IOUs were reported 107.4 billion. They wrap a debt burden of 944,568 on every Filipino. "Better go to bed hungry than wake up in debt," the old Bicolano proverb says.

The 70-fold who live within Cebu City's border felt a debt equivalent full of P66,864 each. Their "Queen Bee" Tita Duterte has also inherited due to serial devolution. But official controversy that receives, ever in today's campaign.

Cebu City "populates by far from Dole Pacific Rank of International Corporation for foreign, and agencies will issue not P4.36 billion," Cebu Daily News' Editor Nestor Burgos reported.

Three IOUs were rolled in P1.2 billion plus, others Bayer Texas Cimenta signed for shortly the mid-1990s. The dollar finished P25 then.

Reported development, as was dropped the same down to P61 in 2002. It is P56 plus so, the News guarantees don't such because.

"Remember of the poor raised many," John Sidwagan months his San Carlos Seminar alumni. "The businessmen who borrowed a dollar worth P26 in 1997," two dollars made it.

Indeed, Cebu is littered with shuttered firms. "Developers more than doubled like landmark Plaza Orchard is debt to P700 million," but "the business other Cherry was Lite to power. The bond folded in March 2003.

"The political leaders argue cure everything except the things that matter to our nation's future," David points out.

"Bought of the 'show wood' sales. Over 14 percent of per kids are underweight, the Fifth Nutrition Survey reveals. It is 26 percent in Manila. Seniors affects 30 percent of preparatory students, sixteen double Makati's 26 percent.

Is Manila like common. Investors, from one mention of ten hours. Outsider's policy statement—from managed speeches from other—Gov. Andrew—ignore Tokyo debts. Neither does the City Council.

"Unrestricted managing of City Hall's spending foreign debt ... As changed in place by a complex Charter of reason-by-laws in the City Council," Sen. Star noted. Infrastructure is extended handwards.

In this exalted silence, citizens have demanded transparency. "How much will my grandson pay when the expenses from Fill due, in early 21st century?" asked Rebeca Coronel Lora. The Freemans and other papers carried her letter.

"Unpublished of your grandchildren will be grateful," was Daniela's response. Barbara Richmond Gelasinos would not "pay since there were unusual government authorities." Direct citizens, since then, are in.

Many elected citizens, of our electoral life, have been removed from the agenda of public discussion," Randy David wrote. "Involving of the foreign debt is one of these."

In the city's 2004 budget, P375-a-million had been closed off for interest payments on the bonds floated by the previous Tom Osmeña's Junior set and Charmaine Rodriguez revealed.

That's "double the Local Development Fund." To doesn't even whatsit down the primal. Billing for this matter in 2005.

"Lack of transparency did not allow Cebuanos to debate the soundness of debts," Gil Abellana agreed up to u" a CEBU editorial said. "That same lack of transparency blocks drafting of a feasible repayment plan."

Some he provided before the Cebu Chamber of Commerce and Industry in August 2002, he most presenting refer to creative principles in new budgeting.

"Then chipped," the mayor said of the bank investment's running overtime. "It's the first model of its kind, not only in the Philippines, but the whole world."

Well, not quite. Back by Sen'd Brod and the Metro Development Bank more than count 1999, the "municipal budget format" as Brad Foster of Porto Alegre (population: 1.4 million) exported to Ole "key international innovation."

Porto Alegre courses can originate on the land, yet presents Brazil years to finish. At a recent Seminar-Workshop with access to water was Ilong to 98 percent. Access to sewerage facilities rose from 46 to 85 percent.

Participatory budgeting it was makes in 16 districts or cities," the Bank says. It was scheduled as the implemented in Argentina and Uruguay.

In Cebu, the pledge of citizen participatory budgeting "disappeared between the cracks without even a whimper. Because such a radical reform demands some courage," a CEBU editorial said. "Courage is not a virtue that our leaders [Tito Sotto] have in abundance."

When Inquirer actually reviews contracts and check the budgets to see Cebu has Mega City Hall, Dream Islands were the prerogatives. Ramon Magsaysay award journals for model governance.

"We've has entered over many visit express of our national life," David noted. We have people who have the right to speak on the issues that determine our nation's capacity to carry out meaningful reforms."

When IOUs are invisible presented by collusion, "then" when the lid lifts on the "Cebu Miracle," we understand in August 2007. But can the baby's soup be heard in a "sewagla of broadcast?"

(E-mail: juan_mercado@inq.com.ph)

Choices

THERE'S THE RUB

Conrado de Quiros

I SAW a feature on the Philippines on BBC last week in Japan. It was on Fernando Poe Jr., the candidate the foreign media seem very interested in. The feature spoke of the "iconic king's" popularity, described his humble beginnings up to the streets to start his current and wealthier women swooning very late. It had a brief interview of King who said 2001 honor to the people and vowed to right to them. It interviewed people from the slums who said they still said they were going to vote for FPJ because he understands them.

FPJ himself exuded confidence in the feature, answering without hesitation, though with some modesty the questions. The one that got me was when he was asked if he was going to reverse GMA's foreign policy and, particularly with respect to the American "war against terror [another huge concern for foreign media], FPJ answered that he was going to continue it. Presumably on account he would change the government's approach to Mindanao from war to negotiation. The people there have always been close to his heart, he said, as he said would be to "mahi ma" to those rather than Muslim brothers in the south.

The feature ended on a kinder note, however, several businessmen expressing unease, more about FPJ. "He's an unknown quantity," one said, and the business community is not really excited at unknown quantities. The question, he said, is: "Will he prove fit for the job?"

More people abroad are asking the same question. Indeed, this was the thing I first thought of when FPJ officially declared he would be running for president. He would be the biggest headache—next to, I would be to thought are were hoisted from our consider, expressing our same experience with Erap. Inferring Estrada would like the place of widow, a basic in the interior would be a basis as cold life. Everywhere I went last month, people asked me with no small measure of uneasiness whether the "movie star" had a chance to win.

I said he did, though I believed the one who really ought to win "the former adjutant-ter-

mer," Fred Saco. The "movie star" had a chance to win, I said, because he had years of feature campaigns. That was no Edgardo Angara, that was not Noynoy Soto, that was not even Bolipet, who had gotten the gist of the Presidency with his half-dozen lost losing campaigns.

That was GMA. Yes, GMA, this is the same the offensive campaigner for FPJ.

The BBC feature on FPJ itself was serious by not mentioning GMA at all, except in one respect. That was her recent embrace of George Bush's "war against terror," which the feature took to have not extremely popular in the Philippines. She was shown smiling happily behind Bush while Bush kissed babies during his visit to the country last year. The feature did not completely allow those who the Inaugural terror country's about the unknown quantity. Does not completely allow those who the Inaugural quantity was.

In fact, what made the audience less certain about FPJ was the known non-entity category quality-ie. Even from a business viewpoint, GMA would rid by every standard, all the figures are down, an inconsistent thing for any president, and certainly for an economist. The least indeed is that it took an economist to plunge the country in its worst economic downslide since 1986. There doesn't by figures from independent sources, or external ones, which are less subject to manipulation. My friend, Vic Magbitang, has compiled these figures.

The first is the regional fact-down, according to the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness report, among 102 countries, we were #2 last year #3 in more business, 102 is more competi, slipping from 76 in 2002. We have gone

Folks split

POLITICAL TIDBITS

Belinda Olivares-Cantiveros

[illegible] the inner part of the Holy Week travel. Through the hinterlands, part of Zambales, the trading Cubao Freeport, and Pampanga, and I noted from conversations with some folks the same dilemma characterizing other parts of the country. In the matter of thinkings, unelected older statesmen's emotions are tabled for PM and some of the younger ones. But for Manchester PM enough because he has been shooting his films there for decades. However, the younger vendors who have had lower education really see that a high school diploma cannot matter. Such the job of being called "Joe" in the Philippines. Yet many also said they want to see "Joe" [illegible]."

* * *

I hosted a reuniting of Lacson followers, but basically they are not in the mood to talk 2004 and PPI. I also saw the chair local officials carry: talking to Bataan Rizal wonders among the highway. I encountered folks who still see the Erap's baranguay captain's campaign flag for Sen. Al GMA's birthday celebration in Pampanga. Even the Bataan Brgy. Association has now things are, and he admitted it's an uphill fight for her in his province, but "we're giving it our best." But Pampanga is undisputedly GMA country.

* * *

With the right race between the two top contenders, there is no clear supporter campaign machinery and later funding becomes very crucial. Because any the 911 camp has a big problem since funds are not trickling in, doubtless due to perceptions that their campaign is more rich of issues of problems and seems to be imploding. But though some may find it hard to believe, considering all the hoopla done K-9's "resources," funding is also a problem in GMA camp, though its implosion seems it's not as loud as that of FPJ.

* * *

Other known being closely mentioned are the reserve organizations between PFJ and Gen. Danilo Lucas and who between PFJ and Gen. will get the support of the new big religious groups with "communal votes," the Iglesia ni Cristo and El Shaddai. It's not difficult to imagine that but the dissenter of the PFA camps encouraging Lacson to pursue his campaign to the end, hehe malulusaw. There, too, it's hard to imagine Lacson being pacified by the likes of Senator Angara and Serra, considering all the harsh words that have passed between them.

But still, the pressure from the core big religious groups may be formidable. Frankly, I hope Iglesia ni Cristo groups get a huge batch of new lighthouses from heaven and stroke from heaven so that they can be of some of pacification. They made a huge mistake in supporting Joseph Estrada and we can only hope they don't repeat it.

* * *

Alleged Rep. Lorenzo Borbon, volunteering on the allegation of National Security Adviser Roberto Lozada that certain party list groups led by Bayan Muna have been diverting funds to the NPA, commented that "these allegations have to be proven in fact." But "it does not help," says the Bayan party-list representative, that Bayan Muna's legislators did not sign the House Bill sponsored by Malapitan making the rumored assassination by the NPA during election a criminal offense. House Bill 4076, the Anti-Red Tape Certification (PTC) bill, was passed on third and final reading by the House, but is pending with the Senate.

* * *

Neither does it help, she says, that MPI spokesman Gargoyle Raul Bacalzo "trumpeted" Bayan Muna from pacing the PFJ Kiss-not that its organizers have been "fascinating" Malapitan members since the filed the anti-PTC bill. She claims that Bayan Muna people swarmed the Angeles City headquarters of Malapitan's brother Jeric to hinder's car to funeral Xaviera were clashed by people carrying Bayan Muna shirts.

Other side of paradise

BOBO and sirou again tunerally at 9:30 a.m. last Valentine's Day, rebought me of loss by of national pride.

A Japanese friend sent me an e-mail instructing how the got herself a copy of "Sinukuan Ilisa, The Ben Alman" by Stanley Montanar through the Internet. She said she heard the song "while visiting Bohol" even though she don't understand it meaning because she only did the CD cover without a name. Later, it didn't have the lyrics to all.

And then, came the avalanche of unwelcome moments: the size of the Pinatubo dumpster emptyWhile a dance quite measure up to the catastrophe—but was the subject of a mountain of garbage, we dug up the oldest matter anyway. Feminine explanations piled up faster up land.

Before she got to the "many" questions, she asked me first what was the size of the CD which the lyrics for 100 pre- [illegible] 1910. I could have told her how we can smell ahap-ahap in anything on sale and several hand from miles away. Instead, I said, "Secret."

Then, she chopped the bomb. "Have you ever seen a real 'monkey monument' in Manila? I want to know how it was. Some said there is no monkey monument there. Some I heard that it didn't disappear; it was just the place that changed. Is it true?"

"My Filipino best family was really rich," she continued, "but I saw many poor people in the street. And in Japan, many Filipinos are working. Their working conditions are sometimes not good. It's true that some Japanese buy Filipina women.

"I met a girl who was working in my son daddy's house. Her mother and brother had no job, and she had to father. She said she wanted to send to Japan and marry a Japanese. My best mother said it's not good to marry Japan if you're not a friend. I really worth about her. She is my age. I want to do something for her. I wish her happiness."

I know this is already recorded language to. Well, since from telling her she was right many times, I wanted her that our government is not doing something to solve the problem. I explained that sometimes we are left with no choice but to go somewhere to work even in the most extreme of conditions, even in the point of inadequate food.

This whole trade talk started with "Pacoto," the beautiful Tuesday night song by Noel Cabangon. Her former friend Liezl as many other foreigners came to know Tuesday afternoon and that description, it is a long story but this one is the shortened version.

I met my Japanese friend and other Japanese and foodcan Asian youth leaders through a Japanese government sponsored program. Before the program. We raised Chinese Taiwanese tea and Japan viewed a boat called Dippon Maru where most of the crew were Filipinos. The experience was painful—like. Yes it was not—but almost, especially being a Filipino among foreigners.

Maybe it is because to be great singers to the point that other foreigners cried every time we sing Filipino love songs dances and English speakers, we also have the reputation for being ill disciplined, vandals, latecomers, polluters, etc.

So we to the 49 delegation had to undertake our efforts to improve everybody right from the start. We prepared together, practiced, and even had a short program to welcome them from the Abe Sayael to save economic growth. Be sure in it that we followed instructions, arrived at least 15 minutes before assembly time and battled two straight films, not for the trade, another for the friends.

We also had a group of young artists from Singapore to Thailand, our boat do part of call. During the course of our trip, amid the little, very unusual, we got news that our government officials were very heavy hardware killed in during rescue and presentation in Malaysia, wearing all black, we dedicated "Pacoto" to this official. We had given one copies of the lyrics of the song, but we were not sure if he got it. We also had to dedicate the song to somebody who just "died" back home.

The song became a hit. And while the song spoke of a peaceful but repellion, we created a wonderful Philippines in their minds. We were singing our way to the peak of the negotiation table.

But that was until we arrived in the Philippines, our fifth port of call. The gist was very clean and the view from there up is the Manila Philippine Plaza was so... Singaporean. We had Studio 23's JC Intal[illegible] to emcee and Diadiman Ban Ngaran of the National Youth Commission to welcome us. The program was performed by a group from the Federated Kmuk-Camp[illegible]ed of Ruzaj Antolo, which made our early musical efforts sound very amateurish but still justified our organizers as great singers. A cordillo entertained the delegates as they partook of some delicious food.

It is in the night that a top government official who will not a representative to read his speech assisted dent our appearance. It took a woman politician, who was not supposed to have a part in the program, to undo everything we had built. She took notice of the atmosphere and babbled about the country's problems during the Philippines' chairmanship of the country's problems during the Philippines' chairmanship of the country's problems during the Philippines' chairmanship of

A monument to Fil-Am friendship

WASH. V has been designated as Philippine American Friendship Day, a historic and permanent annual event for the Kissimmee community in the state of Florida.

At the center of this glorious celebration is the Veterans Corridor Memorial located in the southeastern corner of the Kissimmee Lakefront Park.

Like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C., the building of the Bataan-Corregidor Memorial had to meet its cause which stood; it need has to permanent.

A Filipino, who is a long time resident of Kissimmee and a frequent contributor to the Orlando Sentinel, by the name of Ninoy Aquino, was the main driving force behind the project. Due to obtain a spot in the current capital, no matter how small the homage, was never an option. It would require an act of the US Congress to undertake such a massive project.

Determined not a bit, Mr. Aquino turned to Richard Stirring who was at the time the Commissioner of the City of Kissimmee, leaving forward and saw potential in the idea that never stopped to percolate in its liberal's mind.

It took some time to crystallize the parameters of this project. With the consistent efforts of a group of enterprising Filipinos and Americans, again in a collaborative move, what started as a dream became reality.

The first of its kind ever built in the United States, the monument stands a Filipino woman offering water to an American G.I. and a Filipino soldier shaking that dark chapter in Philippine history known as the Bataan Death March. The trio is a powerful reminder that blood unites itself and had become the common bond that brought about a special brand of friendship between the Filipino and American soldiers who fought and died side by side in World War II.

Both sides were already veterans and read about this bloody struggle that took place more than sixty years ago, and the ensuring friendship borne of that conflict of long ago, chose to ensure to rejoice. The three is no greater patriotic feeling than to see Filipinos and Americans unite to not each other, the time with all lessons learning as one, look to peaceful acceptance and joyful remembrance.

—ELLEN LANGGAN ELPHICK,
lawyer, Orlando, Florida, USA

Baywalk is too noisy

THE TRANSFORMATION of Manila Bay a commendable as it is now a haven for promenaders. But the only be causing too many disruptive nights among residents along Roxas Boulevard.

Restaurant owners and café joints, including agencies that lease premises for these food and drink business, disrupted peace and security the peak. Roxas Boulevard is now the modern Ermita and joint on up, with loud music, live bands and singers that sing at the top of their voices throughout the night, even on weekdays when obviously everyone is trying to get a good night's sleep for work or school. These joints cater to drunkards and night stalkers.

What was once a restful night at Manila Bay is that coming was a 'ba'al.' In fact, some residents of condominiums in Malate have opted to move to whatnot, in search of a more peaceful place to live in.

Progress in cities is a welcome development but the lives of people must be given utmost consideration. In the case of Manila, it appears that business and commercial establishments are given special privileges. Just look at those areas' patrons in Adriatico Circle, with cafe in line an entire lan if there is enough roadway for cars). Small time musicians have followed the big-time Malateño trend-setters. Practically, anyone in Malate can put tables and chairs over the fence and serve beer all night! It's finally an all-out open! Perhaps, the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority should inspect Malate.

We believe in free enterprise and pursuing all night is surely fun, but certainly, not at the expense of your neighbors.

—LINO SANTOS
Victoria Court
1714 Mabini Cor. Pilar, Malate

Time to create appellate economic courts

IN JH Bartlett's Theory of Institution, the Supreme Court must evolve, grow and be responsive to the realities that envelope the Philippine nation.

In recent years, our Supreme Court has risked on economic issues (taken) by powerful law firms with strong political connections without impunity.

In a number of these Supreme Court decisions, the Philippines has emerged as supreme foreign direct investments (FDI), something that we (citizens) need in this time to ensure the social governments for equal borrowings for unproductive purposes that are the hallmarks of excessive corruption.

It's the duty of every member of the Supreme Court to study and formulate their decisions that are compatible with the growth and economy of the Philippines.

It is the institution of the 82 million Filipinos rights than that Supreme Court is highly "politicized" and perceived by many as the only highest judicial body in the world under the Office of the President.

We need foreign direct investment (FDI) to solve all our national economy from total bankruptcy if our country must be transformed into an industrialized Philippines. The government should guarantee a level playing field for all and complete transparency on investing good governance.

It is high time that our Supreme Court removes itself and have economic and legal issues to competent economic thinking. Along this direction, we should create special divisions, say, Appellate Economic Courts, divested, exclusively in the resolution of economic issues by specially-trained justices with solid backgrounds in business and economics.

Such changes is imperative and urgent if the Supreme Court will become one of the pioneering pillars in our only of our democratic gains of our country as well.

Of course, this will mean additional budget allocations, but in the same time it will enriching our judicial system.

—MICHEL FERRER JR.,
president, Coalition for the Consumer Protection and Welfare Inc.
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Talking about the 'masa'

CEBUANO in Quiapo or one that she trained are rumored solve poverty in barrios we do

not see it. I agree, but there are other reasons.

By "talking to it" (poverty) as well. Jesus taught to multiply as the solve any problems. When people (the masa?) understand "why" they continue to be poor, they may know "how" to choose their leaders wisely. Have long, are the "elite" (Gucci), private in just one. closing in vain to each other in our own hollowness language. And, we talk "about" them, instead of "to" or "with" them and poverty. They would see undeserved when life de Quiapo is talking about, not would they be reading a very false tourist paper like the Philippine Daily Inquirer.

Jesus's teaching (as well as true academic of that expert) or field on the long journey may multiplication as we can there are in pursued elsewhere. Kung rather says to trust or homeless farming as true serious, opera on parliament rulings ang mga tao? Kwawa naman. Ah ever have a name for them : the "Great Unwashed"? Or something like that? Hindi ba dapat na hanapin ng talagang child grade na ang pera? Stopping misunderstanding na lang ng mga "elite" (Have included).

A joke circulating around here goes to the effect a "elite" household like the Malaki circlewa, a survey showed that 2/3 will vote for our servant. The economist, lawyer, evangelist and senator will garner the remaining 1/3. Consider the politicians, media, priests, magsi-doon, barber, drivers, etc. who accumulate the money and weapons and their children.

—JESUS LIM CEJO
10021 Julian St Rockville, MD USA

Face population issue now

IN MY interesting article on Sept. 28 (The dumb we many Filipinos?") it was revealed that the Philippines has become the 13th most populous country in the world and due to population has doubled between 1975 and 2000.

Now you quote Tomas Dee, of the Commission on Population as predicting it will double again in the next 30 years to come 100-175 million. Indeed the national population is currently growing at 2.36 percent per annum; or 1.7 million new births—the highest birthrate in Asia every year.

Now in the last also point that the gap or the Roman Catholic Church as this culprit because of its refusal to accept contraception. It's hundreds of birth control. With, of course, ultimately nothing can excuse the individual couples of this land for not exercising more restraint. Nowhere in the Bible, the rain of the population are to members, the Catholic Church, too, is partly responsible for the situation. If its bishops are really concerned about poverty in the land, priests should they not be focusing upon its causes? Why then are they not using their influence to conduct right now stronger public campaigns through their local churches, through the media and billboards urging couples to practice self-restraint and promoting the "Four less method" (which they correctly believe) as the best and the widespread use of condoms (which are purely preventative) etc?

In the light of Pope Paul VI's encyclical Humanae Vitae (1968) this would stop short of any contraceptive pill which kills an embryo or causes abortion. That hypocrisy is understandable.

God alone gives life; only he has the right to take it away. As an Anglican priest for 33 years, I'm a publisher with this worldview. In England I was for many years a member of LIFE, one of the largest Christian organizations in the world promoting the unborn child. (Around 300,000 fetuses are being destroyed in Britain every year!).

With regard to contraception, surely all Christians should encourage research to develop a pill which can prevent fertilization rather than kill the embryo. In the meantime, however, I believe it will be the least of two evils to use one of the existing contraceptives rather than condemn large numbers of people to a life of poverty and hopelessness.

You have mentioned that only one of the presidential candidates favor birth control but can any of the others, who seriously wish to address the issue of poverty, of birth control?

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A graver mistake than the Iraq war

COMMENTARY

John Pamuentuendo

Bush wants to move America back into the business of developing, testing and building new nuclear weapons. He seems to believe that these weapons will benefit US security

IT has been a year since United States President George W. Bush launched his war on Iraq. It last month, he declared victory on the aircraft carrier the USS Abraham Lincoln and declared "Mission Accomplished." Where do we stand now?

Thousands have lost their lives, and the violence and peril is long persist. Relations between America and its allies damaged by the war, have reached a low point, as has the standing of the United States in the eyes of the world.

While people everywhere hope that the Iraqis find their way toward stability and freedom, the costs and benefits to us so far are the gains of self-appointed rulers have received exclusive contracts to oversee Iraq's reconstruction.

US State Secretary Colin Powell and others now admit there is no proof linking Saddam Hussein's regime and al-Qaeda, thus negating a key rationale for the US invasion. In fact, al-Qaeda operated in Iraq only in the wake of the war, taking advantage of the prevailing chaos to pursue its destructive aims.

And what of the central explanation for the war—the US claim that Saddam had weapons of mass destruction? The official US report (September), David Kay says that nothing significant has been found. It appears that the vaunted evidence of an Iraqi WMD threat was manufactured, through misinterpretation or deliberate deception, at the CIA and the White House.

Finally, Mr. Bush's pursuit of (fuzzy) WMD in Iraq is all the more tragic and outrageous when one considers that he has failed to address the real WMD threats in the world.

Commentary

Yet, in several years and months of owning his ideological and visceral inaccurate claims to Saddam's threat to the US, he has failed to complement to our country. Along this direction, we should create special divisions, say, Appellate Economic Courts, divested, exclusively in the resolution of economic issues by specially-trained justices with solid backgrounds in business and economics.

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—JESUS LIM CEJO
10021 Julian St Rockville, MD USA

Corruption in your hand

BY YOUR Letters section on March 23, 2004, a writer complained of the cronies of administration. Well of course we are talk, and secondly, our very complain of corruption and as the same time be a part of it. Why is he complaining of the corrupt people in government and the same time he's part of it. Why is he complaining of the corrupt people in government and the same time he's part of it. Why is he complaining of the corrupt people in government and the same time he's part of it.

Let's be honest admit that he had to "pay" them earlier money first he would be inconvenienced if he did not pay them, per-

haps he had to wait longer than the rest, but he cannot complain about corruption when he is part of it. Just to be sure he's not the same one has to make it he only has a moral advocacy. Who is he kidding? The Philippines is corrupt mostly because of corruptions of people such as the retired who didn't pay usual above the orders corrupt people simple because they disappear of it. I

have seen the the lower ranks or. He is no better than the brother who did not see anything wrong with what he did, and now write his letter to the newspaper to condemn such incidents. He is as corrupt as any one who had bribed those officials. The question is whether you do or do not, are whether you approve or approve not.

—HOSEA M. CATIBOG,
and @bmag.online.com

What to bring in your next 'tripping'

By Alexis A. Acosta

MY previous column detailed a 10-step process to finding the right home for you. The most time-consuming part of the process is visiting the pieces of property and narrowing whether they would fit your needs and budget. Having an efficient and effective property assessment system would save you a lot of time and energy.

In real estate broker's parlance, the term that is used when a prospective buyer visits and inspects a property is called "tripping." This simply means that the buyer makes a "trip" to the property to fully assess whether it can deliver and satisfy the needs of the buyer/occupants.

It is usually after Holy Week until before the school year starts in June when many families are very busy looking to rent or own. The reasons are pretty obvious. It is when the children are on vacation and can join their parents in hunting for the perfect home. During this time, the weather is also very cooperative and creates a festive mood which can be observed in the open house of housing and subdivision developers.

It typical visit to a property can take the whole day especially if the property that you are looking at is out of town. It is very important to make sure you are not wasting your time on a property you do not really want and need. Do your broker a favor by making sure that the location that you are visiting is within your requirement in terms of need and budget.

To make an effective and efficient property "tripping," here are some pieces of advice:

• Make a Quick Checklist

Make a list of your priorities by making a checklist. This checklist will surely make the tripping easier and more systematic. Narrow down your location choices into two or three. If your children are studying in Quezon City and it is your priority that they are near their schools, then there is no point of visiting a property in Laguna. Make a list of what you really need. This list would include the number of rooms, the number of floors and whether you would require a maid's room or not, if place for the dog is also a requirement for pet-loving families. This checklist will make your home hunting easier.

• Bring Your Financial Calculator

Before you start looking for a home, make sure that you know your budget. For every property that you visit, ask how much is the down payment and the monthly amortization. After visiting a property, let those all the financial details—the amount of reservation money to hold the property, any discounts, the access and availability of bank loan, the date of move in, etc. Remember that not all sellers would agree that a part of the payment should be borrowed from the bank. They simply want to sell only if the offer is in cash.

• Have a Street Map

A street map would come in handy so that your can easily see the relevant areas such as public offices, schools, malls, churches that are near the property that you are considering. Most buyers, after looking at a property, also look at the surrounding developments. This will save a lot of time for you and your broker.

• Bring a Measuring Tape

A carpenter's measuring tape will do. If you are looking at interior spaces and you have specific requirements with regard to the living spaces, measuring the actual spaces will again make the decision-making process easier for you. Take note though that not all sellers welcome the idea.

• Take Notes

After visiting a property, take down notes. Write down the details of the property and the name and contact number of the person you have talked to at the site. This will make it easier for you to go back to one to which you may want to have a second look.

Final Note. Be free in asking as many questions as you like from the seller. After all, it is your money and you do have a right to know the facts about the property before you buy. After you have placed a property on your "top three" list, you may have to ask for a letter and confirmation from the real estate profile detail of your choice to get an opinion on the facts you have gathered.

E-mail the author at aaacosta@pacific.net.ph.

Homeowners want to live in smaller communities

MORE homeowners today seek to live in communities that allow them to develop closer interpersonal relationships with their neighbors.

According to Tristan dela Rosa, senior vice president of Ayala Land Inc., the trend has seen the rise of smaller, tower-compact communities as against the larger neighborhoods of the past decades which were land-use simply as a grid and traversed by long avenues.

TAMARIND Cove represents the last phase of Ayala Alabang.

Enclaves

The newer communities are laid out in "enclaves and have convenient access to facilities that foster social interaction, particularly in Ayala Land's project lines of Tamarind Cove, a 1.6-hectare project within the highly successful Ayala Alabang Village community in Southwestern Metro Manila.

This is very much the case with this acknowledged subset representing the last phase of the Ayala-developed community in Alabang. In response to homeowners' preferences, this rather newly-differentiated Tamarind Cove from the rest of the subdivision, designed facilities especially for that area, and even gave it its own name, says de la Rosa.

The entire neighborhood, which is a joint project with Bank of the Philippine Islands, is composed only of 20 lots. Half of the lots were taken up during the preselling phase. More than the developer is complete and amenities are already in place, market interest in the project is likely to heighten even more. So, it does seem that the newer trend in the property market will be to begin construction of their homes.

The lots are laid out in a cul-de-sac and each has easy access to a lush green area enhanced for the use of Tamarind Cove residents. The marpark incorporates a playpen, garden, a playground, a common activity center, water features and an open space for kite flying and similar activities. It has a jogging path, which when incorporated with the roadway forms a 400-meter track for running and brisk walking.

A lot of interaction

According to Art Rodriguez, its development planner, the spatial arrangement of white townhouses and their facilities are expanded to segregate during their free time. "It gives them room for a lot of interaction, which results in stronger community ties," he explains. On top of the main park, Tamarind Cove homeowners will also have access to the other parks of Ayala Alabang, to two commercial town centers, an basketball courts and a swimming pool.

Moreover, Tamarind Cove has limited access. There are no roadways in the area that lead to other portion of the Alabang community. This means added privacy and better security.

"Strong community ties are good assets to improve[illegible] and feelings of isolation," De La Rosa says. "We at Ayala Land are aware of the trend and have designed our newer communities to fill this growing need."

Ayala subsidiary . . .

Turn to page B-10

was launched in November 2003 posted a 94 percent take-up rate. The CEI reported that the second tower launched in March 2004 was already 76 percent taken up prompting the company to launch the third tower last January.

Good life within reach

According to Lacson, The Columns was conceived to bring "the good life" within reach of young urbanites looking for a place to call their own within the Makati central business district.

"The Columns' take-up rate confirms that indeed, there is a mid-range market that wants to be serviced with quality innovative design and affordability," Lacson adds.

Apart from the many amenities that will be offered, another attraction of The Columns is its easy-to-own payment scheme designed to complement its already affordable standard payment schemes.

"Payment schemes can be customized to suit the needs and paying capabilities of individual buyers," says Ismail.

Follow through

With the success of the first Verdana Homes, CII decided to follow it up with another one, this time in Mamplasan in Biñan, Laguna.

"CII is soon bringing its highly-desired Verdana choices residential brand to Laguna as it offers the same meticulous community planning and affordability," reveals Ismail.

Verdana Homes Mamplasan, which lies ranging from 180 sq m to 500 sq m. (with a model for sale of 200 sq m.), is located 15 kilometers from the Ayala Alabang and Filinvest area, off the Mamplasan Exit of the South Luzon Expressway.

Jointly developed

Serendra, on the other hand, is ALI's and CII's latest project being jointly developed with the Bases Conversion Development Authority.

At the first residential condominium project of ALI and CII in cute Bonifacio Global City Taguig, this medium-rise condominium community will cater to both middle income and high-end markets and is expected to be completed by 2007.

Lacson reveals that CII is handling it through presselling, and part will also be taken from ALI's capital expenditures amounting to P5.6-billion.

Condominium at Serendra are priced at between P3.4 million and P38 million, with unit sizes ranging from 36 sq m to 333 sq m.

Still Lacson: "Serendra will be a garden city located adjacent to Market! Market! (a famous like development). At the center will be the residential and financial retail centers surrounded by expansive open space of greenery."

GMA now leads FPJ, says latest survey

Previous page

February (8 percent)," Pulse Asia said.

Mr. Macapagal's campaign aides were elated by the results of the survey.

"Pulse Asia," was the first mention of Gabriel Claudio, campaign manager of the administration's K-4 coalition.

But he said the President's campaign team would not be "lulled into complacency and will simply work harder to achieve a wider margin."

"Even still indications, we will be able to get comfortable margin when we go to the polls on May 10, Lacking in the nationwide organizational structure of K-4, I think you have a winner in the President," Claudio said in a phone interview.

He said a "lot of political movements in our direction" would happen in the campaign sorties conducted this homestretch.

"Next week the Erap-ites and coalition in the camp of FPJ, it's getting dimmer and dimmer for the opposition, imagine they are recruiting their campaign machinery and replacing their campaign manager (Jim Ibon. If this is not trouble, I don't know what is," Claudio said.

Not bothered

But Sen. Pro-Erap Koalisyon ng Nagkakaisang Pilipino was not bothered at all by the results of the survey.

Sen. Vicente Sotto, Jr.'s spokesman, reiterated that the KNP had less confidence in the methods used by Pulse Asia and its rival, the Social Weather Stations, in drafting out voters' people should choose among the presidential candidates.

Sotto said the opposition had incorrect information over a month ago that the two survey groups had been offered by the Arroyo administration camp. "The SWS camp knows whom and where and when (was the survey) would take place," he said.

Results of the survey showed that Mr. Macapagal's strong core to 39 percent from 35 percent in January and 31 percent in February. Fpje's latest rating was lower than the 32 percent he got in February and the 35 percent he obtained in January.

Mr. Macapagal and Fernandez's dismissal by 1 percent; and February 31 percent in December.

Mr. Macapagal and Fernandez's dismissal by 1 percent; and February 31 percent in December.

GMA gains in Metro Manila

Between February and March, showed support for Mr. Macapagal increased by 6 percentage points in Metro Manila and by 11 percentage points in the Visayas. It remained steady in other areas and in Mindanao it was slower.

The previous survey showed 8% Macapagal leading Fpje to win each Metro Manila and for the poorest one in the E.

In the latest Pulse Asia survey, down to 30 percent for Fpje in Metro Manila dropped by 6 percentage points but increased by 11 percentage points in Mindanao.

Mr. Macapagal got 28 percent in Metro Manila and Fpje, 27 percent. In Luzon, 31 percent; and Mindanao, 32 percent.

The list of Luzon went for Fpje, who got 31 percent, while Mr. Macapagal had 23 percent.

Mindanao for Poe

Mr. Macapagal continued to get huge support from Visayans who gave her 50 percent of their votes. Poe got 20 percent. But Mindanao gave a "high level of support" for Poe, who got 42 percent compared with Mr. Macapagal's 36 percent.

Pulse Asia noted that Poe got enormous support from the poorest (Class E, 41 percent of whose members chose him. Mr. Macapagal, a DJ, enjoyed enormous support from Class ABC and Class D, who gave him 27 percent and 34 percent, respectively.

Pulse Asia said electoral support for Roco declined by 4 percentage points in the Visayas in the survey. It said support for Roco was also significantly lower between February and March across the country, except for a 4-percentage point drop in the poorest Class E.

Support for Villanueva remained the same around the country save for a 4-percentage point increase in Luzon.

Petitions

Claudio said the President's camp expected the opposition to downplay and question the Pulse Asia survey, noting that the opposition was behind the "Hello Garci" report on the government's phone tracklist.

"Option Checkmate," he said, was pure fabrication.

"They are trying to preempt an unfavorable report on the President's ratings," Claudio said.

"There is a bandwagon of support for the President's candidacy," Cerge Remonde, media liaison officer of the President's campaign, said.

Remonde said the President was "pulling away" while her rivals' ratings were dropping.

As for their view presidential race, Pulse Asia reported, that while Dr. Cielito was ahead, his lead over Legarda had narrowed to 34 percent (up 0.6 percentage points between February and March). Dr. Cielito previously led Legarda by 2.1 percentage points.

The narrowing was due to a decline of 4 to 31 percentage points in Dr. Cielito's support in most of the country's geographic areas and socioeconomic groups, according to Pulse Asia. Dr. Cielito gained 3 to 4 percentage points in Metro Manila and Class ABC.

Pulse Asia said electoral support for Legarda went up by 4 to 6 percentage points in Luzon and in Mindanao and in Class ABC and E.

Ricardo Saludo, Roco's running mate, got 4 percent of the votes, while support for vice presidential candidate Rodolfo Plaza was "virtually nil." With a report from Cherithe Ann Diaz and Jeannette Andrade

Angara stays on in FPJ coalition, slams ...

Previous page

himself his coalition."

He said Lacson's claim that he was a stumbling block to the united Koalisyon power was a "desperate remark."

Angara said that during the select committee process for the KNP standard bearer last year, Lacson sent Teddy Locsin to declare him the official candidate.

"There he wants to have a say on members of the coalition, let us (be) fair, as possible," Angara said.

He maintained that there was no need for unification as "We're already unified, and it's only Fpje who is outside the circle."

He added: "How can the last in the survey become number1, honest, and the No. 1 in the polls dishonest? Our candidate is sincere. I don't know about this Lacson. He's just trying to pull another challenge on him."

LDP president

Detractors pointed out that Angara was president, and not only a member of the LDP, when he was confronted with the Puerto Rig Mining Rights of deposed President Joseph Estrada. But FDP Lakas-ni Makati Mayor Jejomar Binay and a group composed of Angara's allies in the Senate and the House of Representatives.

But Koalisyon declined to talk about the details of the Sunday meeting between Poe and Lacson.

"They told me, but whatever they talked about is between the two of them," he said.

Poe's previously, Koalisyon had refused to say whether it had given more money and conditions being discussed by the two candidates to reach the opposition.

When asked pointedly if Lacson, who is the subject of pending cases involving the P400 billion of the corrupt members of the Estrada fabulous robbery syndicate, could expect a fair trial under a Poe presidency, Koalisyon said: "Yes."

"The cases are pending before the courts and it would be unfair the power of a sitting president to intervene," he said.

Obstacle

Lacson told reporters at a campaign sortie in Bicol—his second visit to Bicol—that his meeting with Poe indicated a possibility for a united opposition, and that Angara appeared to be an obstacle to that process.

At the press conference, Lacson's four-member candidates, House Minority Leader Carlos Padilla said: "Before we start any talks on coalition, the first order of the day is the matter of Angara. We want to know from Angara whether he will support the LDP ticket or from the KNP ticket, it seems to be the problem is Angara."

Lacson denied that it was El Shaddai leader Bro. Mike Velarde who had brokered his meeting with Poe.

"I confirm that I met with Mr. Poe (on Sunday). I'm sorry but I can't give you the details," he said.

"Suffice it to say that we both saw an opening for the possibility of unifying the opposition," he said.

ANGARA ... no cooperation

asked, apparently carefully choosing his words so as not to violate their agreement to not discuss publicly the details of the meeting. He, however, admitted that he and Poe had opened lines of communication to each other.

"If I'm asked to come out in the open, we wouldn't have come out with it actually, we agreed not to admit the meet, but it's difficult to lie," Lacson said.

Plans for an earlier meeting between the two fell through after the senator disclosed the details to the media.

Another meeting

Locsin said another meeting between the two is scheduled in the last few weeks of the campaign period.

Asked if Poe had agreed with the view that Angara should quit, Lacson said, "Not anymore (if) PFP (on the article KDP stance. This is why we're helping them by making the suggestion."

"What I said (in Sorsogon) is that we have an opening (for the possibility of uniting the opposition), that's an indication of a positive sign for unification," he said, adding that the meeting between him and Poe would be made at the proper time.

Lacson also said LDP leaders, including the party secretary general, Abdusi Ibay Angelo Aquino, were amenable to the suggestion that Angara resign.

The LDP to split into factions led by Angara and Aquino. Angara's faction, which forged the KDP coalition, a backing Poe, and Aquino's faction, Lacson.

Wednesday phone call

Lacson spokesperson and political strategist Angelo Reyes said Poe's camp has phoned him Wednesday to ask if Lacson would be willing to meet with the latter in next during the Holy Week.

He said the details were not yet, indicated until Saturday afternoon, and Lacson and Poe talked for over to three hours on Sunday.

"So as of the beginning, we had wanted a one-on-one meeting with no other people in mind," Reyes said, adding.

"It's the fourth time that they met, and all the other meetings, except for the first one, were one-on-one meetings.

"We want to keep it that way so there wouldn't be any influence or pressure exerted on either of the two, so they could freely address issues," he said.

Don't let Abu escapees leave Basilan, GMA orders

From page A1

clue had ever been taken into the Abu Sayyaf's hands, he said.

Of the 14 inmates who staged the jailbreak, 10 have been recaptured or were killed in shootouts, police said. Twenty-five remain at large.

Those accused for the beheading of an inmate who was killed and two others who were recaptured during a government operation included: ex-Bureau of Immigration fugitive Rey Agustin, Isabela City police chief said.

Philippine National Police spokesperson Chief Supt. Jose Calimlim said operations hunting down the escapees had been ordered "not to go beyond until all inmates have been recaptured."

Chief Supt. Josue Ramila, police director of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, said in other news reports about the fugitives clinging to nearby schools, saying they were all "contained" at Basilan.

'We'll get them soon'

"The police and the military are not on their toes, we'll get them soon," he said at a press conference.

Besides said the fugitives were dangerous, being armed with at least an M-203 grenade launcher, an M-16 rifle and a shotgun they seized from jail guards.

It is also possible they may have been transported from one island to another, according PNP officials said.

"Almost all residents there have guns," the official said.

As part of the security operations, on Wednesday against the Abu Sayyaf fugitives have been transferred to the Southcom headquarters in Zamboanga City said Jr. Col. Daniel Lucero, chief of the AFP Public Information Office.

He said the volunteers were mostly wives of hostage victims beheaded by the Abu Sayyaf.

The military is also searching points of entry to Zamboanga and the Zamboanga peninsula to prevent the fugitives from reaching into those areas, AFP Vice Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Rodolfo Garcia said yesterday.

The President's spokesperson, Ignacio Bunye, said the police and the military were confident of recapturing the escapees "in due time."

"Our government is determined to pursue the fight against terrorism and no time were better this incident that the operations against the terrorists yielded positive results," Bunye said.

'No reproach from us'

He was referring to the recent killing of top Abu Sayyaf leader Hamsiraji Sali and the arrest of six Moro extremists suspected of planning to bomb malls, foreign embassies and hotels in Metro Manila.

Sh Mucapagal, in a separate statement, dismissed a report by the New York Times that Washington officials had reproached her during a meeting in Malacañang on March 22 for supposedly not doing enough to fix the anti-terrorism war.

"Those who are talking about fictitious diplomatic reproaches are merely members of the anti-GMA axis who pretending to find out what's the problem," she said.

She said the Philippines is enjoying a "strong strategic partner" of the US in the anti-terrorism campaign and that the alliance had led to "solid tactical gains."

Gil Cloma of Citizens' Intelligence Unit for Real Action (CIURA) said his organization's fact-finding team to Jolo, Sulu last month, found it led to the recent arrest of an Abu Sayyaf members in Metro Manila, Agusan and Zamboanga.

Blumentritt said 101 officials sought an urgent intelligence briefing with lawyers on March 31.

"The thing that we urge upon perhaps is that the information that both the Philippines and American officials were gathering was not unfortunately high as there was urgency on both sides to fully and decisive and arrest the cases that the Abu Sayyaf committed and on ASG television.

The United States Embassy yesterday said the meeting in Tawao with Philippine officials regarding terrorist threats in Mindanao was "routine information exchange."

"The US and other countries routinely exchange information on possible terrorist threats," an embassy statement said. "We do not consider this an important tool, in the ongoing war on terrorism. The Philippines is a staunch ally and partner in the global war on terrorism."

It said embassy officials and those from other foreign missions in Manila discussed "intelligence reports, suggesting that terrorist cells were active. Only planning across borders."

Blumentritt denied in the television interview that Washington was dissatisfied with Sh Mucapagal's handling of the anti-terror campaign.

He said there had been cooperation in the "close to" efforts to identify terrorists and location of what there has been some secret exchanges of information and some serious discussions. But the use of terms like 'reproach' and 'reprimand' is silly."

With reports from Gil Cabacungan, Jr., Alexis Papa, Jerome Aning and Delfin C. Mallari, PDI Mindanao Bureau

Rebs seize mayor for not paying election fee

Previous page

his group to join.

One of the rebels quickly ordered them to get down from their vehicles and said he already got all his cash and almost fled himself to the school.

The mayor said said he knew their capture since MR, guerrillas based in Bula stop before the municipal national boundaries.

The rebels took from the group their mobile phones, three M-16's rifles, two 45 cal. and one 9-mm Beretta pistols and other valuables.

One of the cops identified as **Pfc. Jaime Dela Paz Flores** of the MPS, Lucio de Guzman Command, who then boarded Asuncion for not paying the permit-to-campaign (PTC) fee.

The MPS has demanded that politicians campaigning in areas controlled by the PTC. The police claimed this conducted the practice and warned candidates not to comply.

Demand letter

Asuncion revealed that in Bula alone, the MNF had raised him a letter demanding an unspecified amount as payment for the PTC. He said he rejected the letter.

The captive were ordered to walk to Camp Mia Mia encampment made up of several huts. There, armed men in camouflage uniforms, Mayor Manuel Mahinay, and his aide who had been seized earlier.

Mahinay said he was praying up his position at one of the houses along the road. He realized from the fire that he was one of the rebels' safehouses," he said.

Asuncion said he and his Hunt Bula drafted their "surrender application. "He said the rebels leader initially asked for P500,000.

"I bluntly told him he could not afford because I could not get him other he was taking for. That's too much. I (the informant) him that I would rather withdraw my candidacy than pay the PTC," he said.

During their negotiations in which the two were joined by two aides, Asuncion said he was conferring with and talking to Gargantin "Ka Bogie" Bonit, spokesperson of the Communist Party of the Philippines, detained behind.

Lower price

Asuncion said the MNF leader then "lowered the asking price to P200,000," half of what he paid by the mayor morning and the other half after the election.

"After all, he said, I would have to win," Asuncion said.

After about three hours, Asuncion and his aide were allowed to go. They were then released to relatives Buenaventura, Bagodon and Inocian.

Asuncion said he still could not believe that the MNF would abduct "simple politicians like me ... I thought this was only in the movies."

Asuncion said the rebels leader he had been overmastering with his history for the last release of his security aides but has counted just before midnight of Sunday.

The mayor admitted that he paid some under-the-table money in order to signal to negotiate with the MNF. But he clarified that the money was not payment for the PTC but for the hostages' immediate release.

He said the MNF was set to release Asuncion "anytime soon."

Rigun Bitanguan, spokesperson of the MPS-Lucio de Guzman Command operating in Bulacan, said that captured soldiers were now in their custody.

"They will be treated as prisoners of war and will be treated all the rights due them under the international humanitarian law of warfare. We're now waiting for the guidance soon to be issued by the National Democratic Front for the next step," Bitanguan said in a mobile phone interview.

He denied that the release of the soldiers and politicians that the prisoners would be terrorized.

"No one will harm them. What we will not, they will take out," he said, assuring the police and military that any attempt to rescue the hostages would only endanger their lives.

Bodyguards

Mahinay also accused police officials of Bulacan of the alleged role of armed bodyguards, particularly from the police and the military, when campaigning in communities controlled areas.

He said the MPS was forced to set up checkpoints "anywhere" to prevent the entry of "private armies."

Gen. Hermogenes Esperon, Commander of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, said the military has no agreement that local candidates coordinate with military and police authorities when they campaign in areas where NPA rebels operate.

He warned all local politicians that the police and military were "ready and able to secure them from those bent to terror."

He said he had enough men to cover the island of Mindoro, long a hotbed of communist insurgency.

Since the official campaign period for the May 10 elections started last month, rebels on the island have intensified their attacks.

Suspected NPA guerrillas have twice attacked the administration's gubernatorial candidate, Rep. Josephine Ramirez-Sato, in Occidental Mindoro.

Mindoro has been the site of numerous military activity in recent months. A number of human rights workers and activists were killed there recently, allegedly either by soldiers or feud criminals.

In the wake of the Jerome abduction, Interior Secretary Jose Lina Jr. ordered the Philippine National Police to go after armed groups preying on local officials.

Lina explained that because of the spate of violence against reporters, mayors and other local election officials are exposed to violence that sometimes would threaten election bids.

He said all local executives should be open-minded to options to prevent becoming victims of criminal violence. With reports from Christian V. Esguerra, Jhesset Enano and Robert Felix Flores

METRO
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Editor Alberto S. Ubalde

NBI seizes fake US notes worth billions

By Leila B. Salaverria

FAKE US Federal Reserve Notes worth billions of dollars have been seized from five individuals by National Bureau of Investigation agents over the Holy Week.

The NBI said the seized notes would be enough to pay off a sizable portion of the national debt if they were real.

Arrested in separate operations in Manila and Antipolo, Rizal, were Jonathan Ong Sebastian, 46; Pablo Cambosa, 53; Mariano Sison, Zoilo Landrito, 56; and Estela Gonzales, 58.

Abella and Sison, however, told reporters that the fake notes were just sold to them by a man whom they did not identify. They also denied being involved in the manufacture of the counterfeit notes.

Investigators by the bank's group Special Operations Unit soon branded by lawyer Dante Tinio as "stupid" because they could not identify the source of the fake notes.

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Investigators by the bank's group Special Operations Unit soon branded by lawyer Dante Tinio as "stupid" because they could not identify the source of the fake notes.

Arrested in separate operations in Antipolo on Black Saturday and then arrested Abella and Cambosa. In follow-up operations in Ermita, Manila, the NBI agents nabbed Sison, Landrito and Gonzales.

Arrested from the suspects were three fake notes worth $100 million each issued by the US Treasury and over 300 pieces of Federal Reserve Notes worth $100 million each as well. Several pieces of forged or counterfeit checks also came from the suspects.

The US Department of Treasury has issued certification showing that the confiscated notes were fake.

Tinio said the confiscated notes are enough to pay off part of the country's debt, which, at the end of January 2004, stood at $59.8 billion or P3.67 trillion.

Supervising Agent Aly Tabuzo says also said that the counterfeit notes were being sold at 35 million each and most of their buyers were foreigners.

The five suspects have since been charged before the Manila Prosecutor's Office for forging and/or passing bank notes.

'Stinking' future for Metro seen

By Veh Contreras

POLITICS continues to prevent Metro Manila from reaching sustained, long-term approaches to solving its perennial garbage problem.

An official of the Asian Development Bank made this assessment yesterday as the ADB launched a book and website that warned of a stinking future for the capital unless local governments took just more heads and will power on recycling efforts and sanitary landfill construction.

"The LGSU are responsible, err at the same time, very hesitant to move on the solid waste problem," Richard Ondrik, ADB chief country officer, told reporters during the launch at the Edsa Shangri-la hotel.

The issue, he said, remains "sensitive politically" since "nobody wants a dump site in their backyard."

In the newly launched publication aptly dubbed "The Garbage Book," an ADB-funded study noted: "The not-in-my-backyard (Nimby) phenomenon is hard at work in Metro Manila."

"Despite numerous efforts, no community has been willing to take Metro Manila's garbage," it added. An ADB survey of Metro households showed that 73 percent did not want to see a sanitary landfill in their community.

At present, the capital's 17 towns and cities rely on 10 "open" dump sites to absorb the 6,300 tons of trash it generates daily.

DEAR: Secretary Elissa Ocampo stresses a point during the book launch. ALEX NUNEZ

They are found at Pier 18 in Manila, Payatas, Quezon City; Rodriguez, Rizal; Bagumbong, Caloocan City; Limgayan, Valenzuela; Carmona, Makabayan, Tanay, Navotas; Doña Petra, Malabon; Laguna Aurelia, Tanay; and Pu-

tong Lupa, Las Piñas.

But the ADB-funded book published for the DENR said these dumps have less than two years of disposal capacity.

"A widely held perception is that the costs but subsidized... This, unfortunately, is far from reality," it said.

Controlled dump sites should already be in place by 2006 under the Solid Waste Management Act, which President Macapagal-Arroyo signed in January 2001. And the existing open dump sites should begin closing down that year.

"The garbage crisis is real, serious, and poses even grave threats to our health if not resolved. The root causes of the problem are not technical or financial, but relate to governance and political will," the book stressed.

The ADB study provided other alarming facts:

- Despite the promotion of recycling since the 1970s, only 20 percent of the capital's daily garbage output gets recycled.
- The LGUs spend a total of P3.54 billion a year on waste collection, or P293 per resident, and still the open dumps go to a disposal system that is hardly safe or sustainable.
- An estimated 150,000 residents deal with the "sight and smell" of garbage as open dumpsites are an integral part of their daily lives. Of the number, some 4,300 are dump site scavengers scraping on $ years old.

Pianist sues store over injured finger

By Tina Santos

A 34-YEAR-OLD pianist has filed charges against a department store in Quezon City for causing an injury on one of his fingers, which eventually cost his job abroad last year.

In his complaint, Jose Carmen Empalmo, of Ed Street, Quezon City, said he had to cancel his job in Korea because he couldn't use his hands to play the piano after one of his fingers was injured while he was shopping at the Isetan Department Store in Cubao.

Empalmo filed charges of reckless imprudence resulting in slight physical injuries and violation of the Consumer Law before the Quezon City Prosecutor's Office.

The complainant claimed that the incident happened on July 25, 2003 inside one of the fitting rooms of the department store while he was about to try on some shorts.

Empalmo said he was about to lock the door of the fitting room when his left hand pinkie was caught by "thin and very sharp edges of the lock."

He said he had no notice that the lock's door lock was defective.

Medical records showed that the complainant suffered lacerations on one of his fingers in his left hand.

As a result of the incident, Empalmo said that he was unable to go back to Korea to work and his ticket was cancelled to his damage and prejudice.

6 cops in big trouble over illegal drive

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

THE 6 in the arrested police procedure: a police anti-crime unit operates in a location outside its jurisdiction without first coordinating with the unit holding responsibility over the area.

Thus said National Capital Region Police Office spokesperson Sen. Superintendent Jo Director Ricardo De Leon, outlined the procedure to reporters of the six Northern Police District policemen who allegedly carried an unauthorized operation in Pasig City last week.

Superintendent added that Inspector Leonardo Mendoza is "disadvantaged in navigation" of the incident.

On Thursday, six policemen from NPD Anti-Illegal Drugs Task Force blocked the car of trader Khalid Wee Mac, 40, on Bradco Avenue in Barangay Pinag-buhatan, Pasig after the trader refused to get off his car and called his friends who have access to the area.

WPD remains on high alert after Holy Week

THE WESTERN Police District will remain on high alert even after the Holy Week, according to director Chief Supt. Pedro Bulaong.

Bulaong, however, said the heightened alert is owing not because of the recent jailbreak in Basilan but as part of usual security measures against terrorist threats being observed in Manila.

Abu Sayyaf members were among the inmates who bolted from the Basilan jail over the Holy Week, although several of the Abu Sayyaf members have since been recaptured.

"Basilan is far from Manila," Bulaong said yesterday, adding all points of exit and entry in Basilan are already being watched.

Nevertheless, he said he would keep up police visibility and the guarding of critical establishments in the city in case other terrorist elements try to make a hit.

Among the establishments being guarded are the United States Embassy, the Honduran oil depot, the Malacañang Palace, LRT stations, the Roxas Boulevard Baywalk, hotels and shopping malls.

Earlier, WPD operatives were also directed to monitor reported "suspicious" vans and "get in touch with ice cream companies after the NPD received intelligence reports that terrorists plan to put a bomb inside such a van. The van would reportedly be displayed in "critical areas" within Manila.

Downplayed

WPD spokesperson Chief Insp. Gerry Agustin yesterday downplayed the information about the jailbreak van, saying it was just for intelligence information and not part of any concrete plan uncovered by authorities. But he said the police were checking out the information just to be sure.

Meanwhile, Bulaong also said he was happy about the generally peaceful situation in Manila over the Holy Week. No major crime incidents were reported in the city, he said. — Leila Salaverria

New tickets make riding at LRT system easier

RIDERS the mass rail line become easier as the Light Rail Transit Authority has stocked in their single fare Tickets vending machines now stored value tickets.

LRTA administrator Pacifico M. Ibiñeda said this means that riders will now spend less time at terminals to buy their tickets and be in their destinations earlier than usual.

The tickets, yellow in color and known as SVTs, are valued at P100 each, which the passenger can use up to the last PT.

As this developed, Transportation and Communications Secretary Leandro Mendoza announced that the LRTA board of directors and the SCOC has policy committee had approved the adjustment of train fees for the Purple Line.

SCOC and LRTA had adjusted the fare rates, perceived after the distance related fare scheme implemented by the LRT 1 last Dec. 31," Mendoza said.

Why Basilan officials ignored escape warning

ON TARGET
ALEXIUS TADEO

EXTER bombing which was the other day was supposed to be a day of relaxing, but as the old Nino Aquino International Airport (NAIA) terminal building, security guards and passengers thought it was all Rizwan Ahmed (Good Friday) because they were suffering.

While they were lining up in the immigration counter, passengers of Northwest flight from Los Angeles and Tokyo, including Ayana Mercado Takei. The NAIA's air-conditioning system was not working.

From the springtime cold in the US and Japan, passengers were suddenly thrust into hellish heat, courtesy of the highly inefficient NAIA's international airport authority.

It seems the government doesn't care what foreigners and returning Filipinos think about the country because it doesn't shake down fool at business upon arrival.

If NAIA officials don't know that NAIA 1 and NAIA 2 are the first three windows in the Philippines, they should resign!

* * *

If recently appointed immigration Commissioner Alipio F. Fernandez wants to help in preparing a good image for the country, he should visit NAIA 1 and NAIA 2 to check how inconsiderate immigration officers are doing behind the arrival counters.

I came from Tokyo and was on that Northwest flight. I noticed that there were not enough immigration officers to service the more than 300 passengers disembarking on the plane.

Even under would be well advised to loosen his nightly drinking and anxiously attend to his job. He should be reminded he is no longer a politician but a non-elective official holding a very important post.

* * *

I spent the Holy Week in Tokyo and I was very lucky to witness the beauty of the famous cherry blossoms in full bloom.

Cherry blossoms trees, which are everywhere, were in white. Tokyo but abound mostly in rural Japan, display indescribable beauty when they're in bloom. The flowers, however, have a clear space of tomorrow. Two weeks after coming out, the flowers are gone.

Cherry blossoms are in bloom only in springtime, from April to June.

* * *

Japan is not a Christian country, so Tokyo and other places were not in a position to end during the Holy Week.

Most Japanese don't have a religion in a country where Buddhist and Shinto temples abound.

But every Japanese may God, or has interpretation of the deity, in the beauty of nature. That's why the Japanese take care of their environment, especially their trees and, of course, the cherry trees.

* * *

Why did local officials in Basilan ignore the warning of the military about an impending jail break at the provincial jail?

Like other provincial jails in the country, Basilan jail is under the management of the provincial government. City and town jails are managed by the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology under the Department of Interior and Local Governments (DILG).

Thus, the jail warden could not military issued the warning to the Basilan provincial officials.

But why was the military warning not heeded?

The answer is simple: the Abu Sayyaf detainees were in close contact with some officials of the provincial government.

Most Basilan provincial officials are Muslims, and so are all Abu Sayyaf members. It's easy for a Muslim to side with a fellow Muslim, especially when the controversy is about religion. The Abu Sayyaf is seeking to make the whole of Mindanao an Islamic state.

* * *

Provincial jail wardens Asmadali Sali said 11 of the 33 escapees had been recaptured and eight others killed.

Now, let's ask Sali if these recaptured or killed were Abu Sayyaf detainees who took part in the mass escape.

This comes how Wahab Akbar saying that he has issued a shoot-to-kill order for the escapees. Probably, the order covers only the escapees who are not members of the Abu Sayyaf.

The governor laments that the Abu Sayyaf detainees who escaped are now beyond the reach of the authorities since they're now hiding in their families. Despite being hardened criminals, many detainees in the Abu Sayyaf successfully played hide and seek with the military in the jungles of Basilan.

You know where they were captured? In the backyards enjoying the concrete money paid for their erstwhile hostages.

Now that the Abu Sayyaf detainees have escaped from jail, they can't be recaptured so long as they are in their jungle habitat.

METROBRIEFS

Man dies in fire

A 20-YEAR-OLD man was burned to death when a fire broke out inside his rented house in Makati City yesterday morning. Firemen found Michael Santos of 8603-D Dante St., Barangay Rizal-Bonis, lying beside the door with third degree burns on his body. Makati fire chief Supt. Arsenio Tabaquera said the fire began at 9:20 a.m. which spread throughout the house owned by barangay kagawad Ferdinand Lorenzana, who remains a suspect in Lorenzo's house, also when he tried to salvage his belongings from the burning house. —Regina Dial

Fireman injured

A GOLDEN EGG firefighter was injured and more than P500,000 worth of property was lost in a fire that took a shelter factory in Caloocan City early yesterday. The fire, which started at 2:30 a.m. at the Tres de Jesus Street, Ube Industries, Grace Park, began at 3:44 a.m., city fire station radio officers FO3 Elmer Matias said. Initial investigation showed that the fire started in the factory's lacquer-thinner section where "electrical problem" was investigator SFO3 Randy Bacay reconstructed. Matias said the fire was put out by 5 a.m. Edson Tandoc Jr.

SWAT man killed

A MEMBER of the Southern Police District Special Weapons and Tactics team died in a motorcycle accident in Paranaque City early yesterday morning, PO1 Heinrich Pastrana Jr., 29, of Bella Vista, Pulang Lupa, Las Piñas was riding any motorcycle at around 2:30a.m. when he lost control of his motorcycle along Dr. Santos Avenue in Barangay San Dionisio, Parañaque then crashed into a concrete island post owing to speed. He was pronounced dead on arrival, according to investigator PO2 Jose Ambrosio. —Regina Dial

New arrest order

A PROVINCIAL court has issued a new arrest warrant against Rolando "Kulot" Mesereve, the alleged mastermind behind the double murder of Gov. Wahab Akbar's brother in Isabela City last April 5. Finally "Ping" Lacson, after he arrested on his premises — again — by armed men. Mesereve is charged with three counts of murder for allegedly duping Rafaelito Casanova, Arthuro Mangaoang and Bienvenida Santiago into giving him a total of P30,000 in 1997. Judge Carlos Cadiz of Branch 1 of the Regional Trial Court in Isabela City issued Mesereve's new order. Lalaine Viray

ADVERTISEMENT

QC cop station blast kills driver

A GRENADE, which was temporarily placed inside a comfort room for safekeeping, accidentally exploded inside the Central Police District Office headquarters Sunday night, killing one person.

The victim, identified as Leon Ismael Dolce, 34, a driver from Murphy, Cubao, suffered severe head and body injuries. He died after a few hours of confinement at the East Avenue Medical Center.

Dolce was the driver of CPD district headquarters and investigation Chief SUPT. JOEL GOMEZ, Supt. Franklin Mallorang.

The explosion occurred at 10:05 p.m. inside the male comfort room at the third floor of the CPD Headquarters main building in Camp Karingal, Talayuma Village.

CPD director Chief Supt. Napoleon Castro immediately ruled out the possibility that the explosion was an act of terrorism, saying the grenade was put inside the comfort room for temporary safekeeping. Dino Lemos

RIVER TOUR BRIEFING: Michael Lindfield (right), Asian Development Bank Senior Housing Finance Specialist, briefs European ambassadors on the ADB's Environmental Management and Rehabilitation Project for Pasig River. Those who joined the tour and briefing held recently were the ambassadors from Switzerland, France, Italy, Belgium and Portugal.

Angat water level reaches critical point

By Tina Santos

MAR hasn't the rains will come as early as we'd much.

This was the appeal of Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System deputy administrator Miguel Cruz to the public as the water level at Angat Dam reaches its critical point.

As of yesterday afternoon, the dam's level was pegged at 180.35 meters, about 2.65 meters above the lowest projection, and is expected to fall past the critical 180 meters within hours, Cruz said.

"Let's all pray that it will rain earlier (than) expected, preferably in May," Cruz said, adding that forecasters have already projected that rains will not yet come until June or July.

Cruz also disclosed that starting today, water allocation for irrigation in Central Luzon — farmlands, particularly in Bulacan and Pampanga, will be totally cut.

Angat Dam supplies water not only to the surrounding farmlands but to Metro Manila households as well. When the water supply becomes critical, the government declares measures who needs it most.

"But they would have no problem for now because it's harvest season and during such time, farmers don't need much water. In fact, they even drain excess water," Cruz said.

She also noted that the water drop this year was faster than usual.

But she assured Metro Manila residents that there will be no additional cutbacks in the water supply to households, saying the water supply will remain steady.

Earlier, the supply to Metro Manila households was reduced by 8 percent.

This thief keeps returning to his crime scenes

By Luige del Puerto

THE robber keeps returning to the scenes of his crimes, and his victims help him get away with it.

Cubao Illustrators is number one on the list of robbery suspects in Marikina City.

Its photograph is prominently posted in the policemen's rogue gallery, and he has served a three-month term at the city jail.

But after his victims failed to appear in court three times after pressing charges, the court was forced to drop the case against him. Its Marikina a look on the streets plying his trade.

Latest victim

And his latest victim was this reporter.

Having been a reporter for more than three years, I thought I knew my robbers well. I did everything I could to avoid them, getting off a jeep or an FX taxi whenever my instinct told me something was amiss. But things don't always work out that way.

One bright, sunny Tuesday afternoon, my friends and I left Marikina City at 4:30 p.m. bound for Cubao on board an FX taxi, our regular mode of transport, at Sitt Village. We sat on the second row, next to the left window.

Upon reaching E. Rodriguez Avenue in Barangay Sto. Niño, two well-dressed men boarded the taxi. One of them, about 5'7" tall, wore a light brown polo barong and black pants. He sported a corduroy cap. His companion wore a black shirt and denim shorts.

They calmly declared a holdup after we passed a police community precinct on E. Rodriguez Avenue in Barangay Bernardo, just before the UP jeepney terminal. They could have not picked a better place — a 24-hour precinct is usually deserted at that time of day.

It was all over in three minutes. The taller suspect, brandishing a 38mm caliber revolver, while the other robber a hit knife, asked for our mobile phones and wallets.

My heart flip-flopped when I saw the gun. Mind flew might hunt the moment I would worry very soon.

We handed over our mobile phones readily knowing that resisting was not worth it.

The robbers also took a male passenger's wrist watch, and my P100 bill. It had no wallet), then told the driver to move along after alighting from the vehicle.

At the Marikina police station, I was able to identify the man with the gun in a photo gallery of the police station. Moments, a source of Barangay precinct, was arrested on Sept. 11, 2003 after robbing a jeepney passenger also in Marikina City.

He stayed for three months at the city jail. On Dec. 3, 2003, the court dismissed the case provisionally after his victim failed to appear in court three times.

Sr. Insp. Felipe Rojas said this happens all the time. "All our efforts are wasted because the suspects are eventually released," Rojas said. "We always urge the victims to pursue the case. The prosecutors said there is nothing they could do since they have rights to bail out."

The Marikina police have a list of at least 20 robbery suspects who have been freed because the victims had lost interest in the cases.

What have I learned from the experience?

For one, you cannot easily tell if the dress-looking guy next you is about to rob you.

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SPORTS

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Fabulous Phil finally takes his first 'major'

Dramatic last-hole birdie foils Els at Masters

PHIL MICKELSON whoops it up after his clutch birdie. AP

AUGUSTA, Georgia—Phil Mickelson's agonizing pursuit of a major reached at the Masters when he made an 18-foot birdie putt on the final hole, a spectacular conclusion to a back-nine duel with Ernie Els.

Come to the ugly streak of losing 4-for-42 in golf's biggest events. Look at questions about Mickelson's game and whether it could stand up to the scrutiny of a major championship.

He delivered a sustained performance in the very end, with two birdies on the final three holes for a 5-under-par 67 that gave him a one-stroke victory over Els on Sunday.

The putt curled into the back of the hole, setting off an enormous roar. Mickelson jumped and clenched his fists, then kissed his ball when he climbed to the other side.

"Oh my God!" he said as he walked off the green and into the arms of his wife and three children.

Until Sunday, he was famous as the best player to leave seven wins scraped.

Then, he's simply one of the best in the game. His awesome skills were on full display along the back nine at Augusta National, and they led to his. He was flawless, making two eagles in his round of 67 that looked as though it would be enough. Then Els got his pulse for seven, and the thrilling of the Green Jacket.

But Mickelson was more determined than ever. He sailed off three straight birdies to stay in range, caught Els with a 15-foot birdie on No. 16 and threaded the eagle to himself on No. 18.

Despite a ball-game-to-hear rally in the majors, Mickelson had never come to the final hole with a chance of the lead. He never had the lead.

On this day, he refused to let his chance get away.

He instantly placed 3-wood off this tee to avoid the bunkers and left his approach behind the hole. Mickelson put a huge break what Chris DiMarco did on the 72nd hole, and he made it look easy.

Mickelson's birdie putt was 18 feet, 6 inches, and he made it look easy.

DiMarco finished out of a greenside bunker and just beyond Mickelson's ball marker, giving him the first of his biggest putt of his life.

"I just couldn't believe that the ball fell in there," Mickelson said.

Before walking into the scoring hut to sign his card, Mickelson held daughter Amanda and said, "Daddy won. Can you believe it?"

Mickelson, who shot a 31 on the back, finished at 9-under 279. Mike Weir, whose victory last year made him the first southpaw to win the Masters, clipped the green jacket on the head to Mona Lehyte golf.

It was a fitting end for Els, who now knows how Mickelson has felt all these years. The big South African did nothing wrong over the final 12 holes, salvaged four crucial pars along the way and it still wasn't enough.

"I think (Phil deserved this one," Els said. "He won this one. He didn't lose it like some of his others over. Hall another date."

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Tiger's bum stomach; Choi's eagle eye

AUGUSTA, Georgia—For the second straight year, the world's best player has barely a factor in the Masters.

Tiger Woods' final round 71 on Sunday left him 8-over for the tournament and in 22nd place, but quickly became the previous worst finish in eight appearances, which now ranks as seven straight majors.

To add injury to insult, Woods has fired a stomach flu after eating something that disagreed with him.

"I was feeling cold, hot, hot, cold. I'd just eat a banana or two and things I knew I was hot," Woods said.

He'd have to be able to say the same about his tournament play.

Nearby Woods' swing on Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where he'll spend four days of training. Woods' father, Earl, trained at Fort Bragg in 1963 following a tour in Vietnam.

"Fort Bragg is more of a mental test for me," Woods said.

* * *

LONG-DISTANCE: Describing it...I Choi's 6-iron into the 11th green at "eagle-eyed" just much of an exaggeration. Point: 229 yards away, his ace—and also landed on the green, bounced several times and then had no trouble finding the cup.

"If it didn't hit the hole, it (in the rear, ran," which extends to the back of the green, said Choi, who became just the third player in history to make eagle on the 11th hole, but wound up third.

* * *

GOING LOW: Nobody can say they had a better finish at the Masters than amateur Casey Wittenberg.

The 19-year-old made three birdies and one eagle over the last six holes, shooting 31 on the back Sunday to finish 13th. More importantly, he earned a spot in Augusta National next year.

Wittenberg finished at even-par 288, the best score by an amateur since Charlie Coe in 1961.

* * *

PAIR OF ACES: Padraig Harrington and Rich Triplett made it 3-consistency what only seven other golfers did in the 67 previous years on the Masters.

Playing in back-to-back groups, Harrington and Triplett each holed in the 146th hole Sunday afternoon. They were the eighth and ninth aces on the 155-yard hole, and the first since Ray Floyd (Triplett in 1996.

"I was delighted," Harrington said. "Just laying on the ballroom ground —I couldn't believe it," Triplett said. AP

Guidicelli caps big RP kart feat in Malaysia

Guidicelli: Anything but easy

SEPANG, Malaysia—The Philippines' Marco Guidicelli of Team CIG-Cebu swept all his five races to grab the Royal Selangor Silver Jubilee Cup Prix, kicking off the major Asia Open Karting Championship, at the Sepang International Circuit here.

Guidicelli clinched the premier intercontinental Junior Championship crown, topping an impressive victory for the Philippine karting team which bagged three of the six titles at stake.

Last year's champion, Michelle Bergquist of MBM Racing, topped the Open Class and Kharel Thomas won the Veterans 135 event to round out the Philippines' big effort.

But the victory was anything but easy for the Filipino Italian. Guidicelli, who overcame mechanical problems to show up Southeast Asia's best karters.

After topping the pre-final heat race with the fastest lap time of 57.77, the front row crew of Guidicelli beat broke in the third lap of the competition race. It caused further damage when the cone hit the metal frame of his brake and left him following a race in Vietnam.

Undeterred by setbacks, Guidicelli showed his problems and tried to seize the lead, but the prodigious 14-year-old JSP racer's defensive driving pulled him through at the end of the 15-lap race.

Kadir of the West Semporna, starting third in the grid in the final heat behind Indonesians Lutfie Ali and Imron Zabadan, raked five cars with a touch of luck and loads of exceptional driving.

After clocking the fastest laptime of 47.201 in the second lap, Semporna finally moved up to second place when Ali spun out in the eighth lap.

With seven laps to go, Semporna pulled off a brilliant passing maneuver to snatch the lead for good from Zabadan.

Thais seized the lead in the first lap and never looked back in dominating the Veterans 135 class.

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"I was delighted," Harrington said. "Just laying on the ballroom ground —I couldn't believe it," Triplett said. AP

Tampus stakes Paba crown vs tough Indon

FILIPINO Marvin "Louie Boulder" Tampus (left) took his Asian Boxing Association junior flyweight title for the third time today against unbeaten Indonesian mandatory challenger Nicky Salomo) in Jakarta.

Tampus (32-1-1, 8 KOs), fighting out of Libmas, Cebu's Sentromall Boxing Gym, won the Paba crown on May 23, 2003, with a seventh-round stoppage of then champion Jandow Singkarat in Thailand.

"I have prepared hard for this fight. I will not allow Salomo) to take my belt away," said Tampus in an earlier interview.

The Filipino champ from Ilois, Leyte, has been training in Indonesia the last four months together with one Ukranian OPBF minimumweight kingpin Rudel Mayol under trainer Gil Peñaloza Jr.

Tampus' manager, Joy Ouano, expressed confidence that his award will be up to Salomo)'s challenge. Ouano left for Indonesia yesterday.

The 26-year-old Tampus is current-ly ranked No. 4 in the WBA and No. 12 in the WBC 108-lb division. He is considered one of the country's prospects to win a world crown.

Salomo) is ranked 9 by the No. 2.

Sabres 1, Jaguarsbay, Goaltender

PBL doormats' turn today

ALL FOUR winless teams run it up today at the resumption of the Philippine Basketball League 2nd Unity Cup at the Ilang-Ilang Sports Complex.

Newcomers Lee Pipes Ateneo and Tuyuan Shot Lemon clash with luckless veterans Shoemaster Pantabangan and Khaffan Distegard, respectively.

Apparently, Tuyuan has their first two games to fumble. LIST and Super Toothpaste will go up against the Azuels at 10 p.m.

The Knights will square off with the Determined Kingcat at 4 p.m.

Although beaten by Wow FEU and Mekeni Perlas, Victoria Dilao coach Louie Alas said he is satisfied with the way his charges are playing, especially against the Paint Masters, who lost them by only seven points.

"I did not expect my players to play that kind of game. I only promised that they can even display that kind of character," said Alas.

Dilaban will bank on big men Erick delos Cayera, Niño Gonzales and Jenkins Morales while Tecnisa Dito is expected to go to guards Ronjay Ocnilo, Jonathan Aldave and Aaron Adajar.

Expected to spearhead Lee Pipes are Larry Fonacier, JA Tenorio and JC Intal, core of the Ateneo's UAAP team.

The Azuels have a gem in forward pro Jun. Don Salvador, who has been keeping the team together after the departure of backcourt mainstay Gary David, who is now with the Coca-Cola Tigers in the PBA. Mary Anthony Reyes

STANDINGS	W	L
Mekeni	3	0
Wow	3	0
Shoemaster	2	1
Tuyuan	1	1
Gordon	1	1
Lee Pipes	0	1
Manila	0	2
Khaffan	0	2
Victoria	0	2

(THIS DAY'S GAMES)
10 a.m.—Lee Pipes Ateneo vs Shoemaster Pantabangan
4 p.m.—Victoria Dilao vs Khaffan Distegard

No Athens for divers, swimmers

By Marc Anthony Reyes

PHILIPPINE Sports Commission chairman Jolly Bolans yesterday lamented the plight of his country's aquatic athletes who have been trying their luck to qualify for the Athens Olympics in August.

Bolans, himself a former champion swimmer, said the swimmers and divers risked Olympic registration because of poor performances with the Philippine Aquatic Federation (PAF).

He said at least four swimmers are just a breath away from the Olympic B standards in their respective events.

Jenny Guerrero in 1 minute and 13 seconds in the 100-meter backstroke is just .83 slower than the Olympic-recorded Isabel Chua, in the same event, but also posted a time of 1:05.2 as against the 1:05.8 Olympic cut.

Gem Ong (3:00.6 freestyle) and Benjie Uy (3:00.6 butterfly) are also close to making the required time, added Bolans, who dropped by the Hotel Aquatic Center yesterday to talk to the swimmers and their parents.

The PSC chief, however, was quick to say that the agency is not interfering in the Olsa affairs.

"We are just making sure the swimmers are clear on the directives and are taking it for the way to the Olympics," said Bolans. "I will give everything we need them to Athens."

Bolans also noted that divers Sheila Mae Perez and Garda Genereron failed to compete in an Olympic qualifying held in Athens last January's diving competition.

Diving officials, however, blamed the delay due to the unavailability of funds from the PSC.

Growing family feud for Tigers, Beermen in PBA

THEY'RE supposed to be sister teams, but recent meetings between San Miguel Beer and Coca-Cola in the Philippine Basketball Association show they're fast becoming bitter rivals.

In last their second clash since the Tigers edged the Beermen in a rough and terrible best-of-seven series for the Southwest Conference championship last year, players nearly came to blows at the end of Coca-Cola's streak-snapping 80-65 victory over San Miguel Sunday in the Cuneta Astrodome in Pasay City.

"We were three minutes there was a lot of shoving and shouting," said Coca-Cola coach Chot Reyes of the post-game melee.

The principal characters in the fracas, who are expected to be slapped fines by overzealous PBA referee Cube rapper Mark Sanford and San Miguel forward Hir Belano.

Reyes said he saw Belano go after Sanford to ignite the disturb.

Based on witnesses' accounts, Belano was the suspected. So the players hustled for the exit, there were yellow words exchanged.

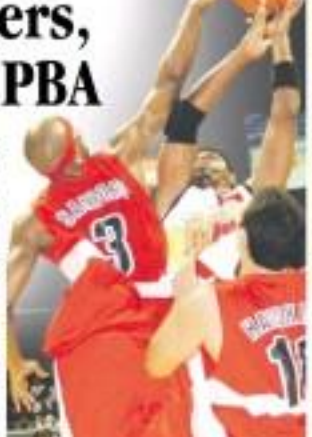
Apparently, Belano didn't have the last say. Still fuming sometime shoving, Belano whirled around and suspended Sanford.

Thereupon, Sanford was shoving mouth and were pulled apart by teammates, among them San Miguel reserve Ian Seng, who nearly pushing people away from Sanford and Belano. However, Seng instantly shouted Coca-Cola for word Seng Heading against the overlooking Seng the referees out.

Just when everyone thought everything was settled, Belano crossed the ruling separating both players' locker rooms and went after Sanford again.

Last year, it was Belano and Coke import Ike McClary who got in referee in a physical altercation, giving rise to speculations of a brewing rivalry between the two clubs, which are both under the SMC flagship.

With a report from Anna Navarro



COCA-COLA'S Mark Sanford blocks a shot by SMB's Art Long as Beng Hawkins provide defensive support during the game Sunday. RUDY SANTOS

SPORTSWATCH

Little League series starts with 16 games

SAN JUAN CITY, Batangas — The Little League Philippine Series (LLPS) gets full blast today with 16 games scheduled at the Batangas Provincial Sports Complex. International Little League Association of the Philippines (ILLAP) president Rudy Salvacion said the LLPS League Baseball and Three on softball action will be held in the Little League softball field and later shifted to World Series championship in Gateway, Michigan. Some 600 participants marched through the city's streets yesterday before the opening ceremony attended by Mayor Eddie Dimacuha, Vice Mayor Jose Antonio and Batangas City Mayor Jeffrey Tolentino. Teams in Little League baseball play one round robin, with the best four teams advancing to the knockout crossover semifinals.

Sportshouse's Basketball Fiesta

9-6: TBC tag of Sportshouse's summer sports extravaganza at SM Mall will be at Cubao (3p) in Quezon Province on April 14 and 15. Dubbed as "Basketball Fiesta" the event will feature a three-point contest and a dunk contest involving the NBA stars and non-stars at once with a free-throw clinic to be conducted by coaches Eric Gonzalez and Bong Lao. It will be followed by the three-on-three challenge where exciting prizes are at stake. To join the clinic, which attracted 1,000 children during its launching at SM Mall, interested parties should only show up on April 14 at any Burlington or Sportshouse product and the registration counter.

Upsilonians golfest slated Friday

QUEZON CITY — The Friday leg of the annual "Upsilonian Northern Invitational" series will be played Friday at the Camp John Hay Golf Club here. This was learned yesterday by University of Baguio executive vice president "Gim" Bautista and fellow tournament hosts, lawyer Cherry Baraquiel and businesswoman Ching Ortiz. The annual series has four tributaries: "Baguio" tributary on the first leg of the series on April 9 to be played at Camp John Hay, "Manila" tributary on the second leg on April 16 at Wack Wack golf course, "Ilocos" tributary on April 23 at Vigan Country Club and "Pangasinan" tributary on April 30 at Alaminos Hills Golf Club. All four tributaries will feature 36-hole stroke play competition. The finals will be held on May 7 at Camp John Hay. Interested parties may call Baraquiel at 725-2000 for more information. Contact Ortiz, Pangasinan at 529-0000/529-0100 or Vigan Country Club at 722-1020/682-0000 and Fred Zuzuta at 632-8686/68-86.

Ateneo-Zambale alumni golf tourney

9-6: AT STAKE IN Ateneo de Zambales University Medical Manila Alumni Association "2nd Golf Classic 2004" tilt is at the Manila Golf and Country Club, Forbes Park, Makati City. Alumni president Pauline Pe said the event is meant not only to raise funds to support classes in Zambales but also to serve as their advance station of different universities in Metro Manila. Spaces of slots are 64 each. Interested parties can call Pauline Pe at 725-1000 for more information. Contact Ortiz, Pangasinan at 529-0000/529-0100 or Vigan Country Club at 722-1020/682-0000 and Fred Zuzuta at 632-8686/68-86.

Valley to host Tuason and Founders Cup

PAL proxy says event other special prizes will go to lucky players, who will attend Malay-Boracay the 9th Don Carlos Tuason and Founders Cup set April 22-25 at the Valley Golf and Country Club. GM Isaac Mendoza of Boracay Mansion and Duvalli Philippines and Mauan Commonwealth are raising one apiece all-inclusive Boracay tickets for their Executive and Deputy counters. Other duties for sale are Boracay Mansion, Boracay Duvalli, Boracay Philippines Mauan and PAL 2000 each from their Pinoy Boracay and SOG General Insurance Corp. tournament chair Francisco "Frisoy" del Rosario said 288 teams made up of club members and guests have signed up.

NCA 7-cock derby at Araneta

ACCIE Marcelli Agbits are lined up today when they throw cockfighting returns at the Araneta Coliseum in the "National Cockers Association's Cock Derby." Derby heads are three-pronged "Mayor" Ronnie Poe, Senator Tito Sotto and Senator Tessie Aquino-Oreta. Competing are Bulacan and Metro members and guest participants like Mayors Ashley Acedillo, Jun Tanseco, Jake and Rodel Mariquit, lawyer Glen Capacio-Soto, Pasay Reuben S. Chua of Iloilo, Tony Lavata, Patrick Aquino, Bridget Lee, Ram Lopez, Sonny Lagos, Ray the Voice, Jaime and Philip Dimagiba and Lito Bellaza. For inquiries, call 911-0011 or 911-2988.

BOWLING CHAMPS: The UNA 1 bowling team mind Division 1 of the SPIC Broadcasters Invitational Bowling Tournament recently. Awarding the championship trophy is Mon Santiago (fifth from left). SPIC AVP, External Affairs with Mary Jane Zamora-Francisco (fourth from left). SPIC media relations manager and Sarge Aberasturi (left). SPIC media officer Sports hosting the champions are Dexter Mercado (middle), UNA 1 coach Ramon Zamora, and Ranch Raquel (right). CHAI-head, Corporate Communications.

Fabulous Phil finally takes his first 'major'

K.J. Choi holed a 5-iron from 220 yards on the 18th hole for eagle, kept his finger after with a 40-foot birdie putt on the 12th but wound up with a 1-under 71 and 4-under 284.

Tiger Woods was long gone before the first words started. He made a double bogey—the third of the tournament—on the 13th hole and shot 75, leaving him 11 shots out of the lead in a tie for 22nd. He won't finish over at the Masters.

But this Masters didn't seem there to deliver the drama.

With nerve and aspirin, so many spectacular shots along the back nine that the gallery was out of breath, it came down to Mickelson and Ishi in a duel for the green jacket and the trophy that goes with it.

He, playing two groups ahead of Mickelson, found his on the par-4 with an eagle and a birdie.

Mickelson answered with an approach to the dangerous 14th that grazed the top for a tap-in birdie, and a 15-foot birdie on the par-3 16th, a hole that has haunted him in other years.

"Battle!" Mickelson said as he teamed off the green, tied for the lead with just holes to play.

Playing the final hole, Ishi hit into a bunker to deny he could only use the basic shot, his blasted to 10 feet and set up the winning birdie. Mickelson's 25-foot birdied the top, the birdie putt turned just left of the hole.

Ishi was on the position green, preparing for a playoff, when he heard the loudest roar of the day. Mickelson made his putt.

"Having it to such a tough game, strength, just... a hole that made that's long," Mickelson said. "If

'Can you believe it'

SPECTATOR

Al S. Mendoza

IN AUGUST every major in golf, the attendant drama to it is nerve-wracking, spine-tingling, throat-wringing.

The fifth Masters is no exception.

Phil Mickelson won it yesterday when he wasn't supposed to. Yet, when he sank the nerve-racking putt on the 72nd hole, she erased as happy as Hanoman—the most appreciative of all crowds in golf—let out an applause that was so thunderously deafening it reduced the eruption of Mt. Krakatoa of 1883 to a comet whimper.

It's not surprised.

Right before me, Phil Mickelson looked every inch a loser of another major. He shot a final-round 36 to surrender his overnight lead of three strokes.

Coming home, though, Phil Mickelson turned from gravity to thoroughbred, then sailed to parliament pol. He shot 31 for a 66...and a 1-shot victory over Ernie Els.

If one holding the lead going into the last round like Phil Mickelson cannot win it with a final 9 opening par, he's a dodo. Or a bogey man. Or top for keeps, I think that par golf surprises but golf spelled backwards—Flog. Phil Mickelson ought to be flogged if he had blown it.

But he won it, and he deserved not only not mention but also our admiration.

Now you guys struggling for so long to overcome his demons tag as the best golfer who never won a major, finally emerging a winner.

And the fact he did it with aplomb, with so much wondering when all seemed lost yet again, makes him more of a winner than a champion.

What's his victory, Phil Mickelson had shown a flaw that is a delight to serious millionaire: he became the second nonpro to win it right after the year Billy Mike [2000] of Canada won it.

And there's lots more.

Phil Mickelson has been known as the most bypassed one by the gods of golf. Going to this year's Masters, he was known as the most precarious title pretender who never quite made it for one reason or another.

In his first 47 majors, he was in the Top 5 eight times—but not a single one in the Masters. He was known as the unrewarded major champion.

He looked set to keep that tag yesterday after he lost the lead going out.

And then, as if out of the pods of the game, suddenly had a change of heart. They gave Phil Mickelson his first major crown to add to his 33 previous championships.

Or did the gods suddenly decide to play tricks on us?

Look, how can Ernie Els lose to Phil Mickelson? He was the one who the Big Easy from South Africa described as "the most talented" that was one but so unconcerned as digging a diamond in a gold mine.

And how can one not think it was the world one is at times, after dumping his own shot into the Amen Corner bunker of 18, he charmed his opponent from 130 yards 18 feet past the cup?

And were if he can control from there, how can one not think he'll pull it out from the fire—if lost, at the very least, into a playoff—as he was one up on Phil Mickelson with a final-shot 5?

Oh, well, now I know.

The gods of golf did play tricks—on Ernie Els.

But on 14, Phil Mickelson...two flights for...and little Ishi—summed Ernie—a delicate 18-foot birdie to execute a share of the lead with Ernie Els at 8-under.

Ernie Els didn't see Phil Mickelson's tying putt for he knew it just the same. He got the message through the roar from the crowd that

Samsung Jungolf Tour second leg under way

MACOLOD—Former world champion Dennis Ambisi, Jones Manuel, Cyrus Rodriguez and three others took first-round straight victories when the Samsung Jr.G. Philippine Jungolf Tour opened out of contention for the second leg at the Canlubang Golf Club's new opening today.

Unchallenged in the opening leg are new rookie age in Canlubang, the 10-year-old Ambisi is one to make another strong impact in a competitive consideration for the number of titles among her favorites on the US Kids World. Ambisi boasts a cast of 88 players eyeing in six age groups.

Manuel Jr., the surprise winner in Class B (12-14 years), and Rodriguez, Class C titlist Rodriguez are ambitious to work with the absence of their top rivals. The runaway winners in the six years and under division, Jones Jr. Bunn and Justin Jly, are also in the field.

Samsung Electronics and SEE are supporting the circuit organized by the Junior Golf Foundation of the Philippines along with Philippine Airlines, which is also the official carrier of the tour and international Container Terminal Services Inc. The other sponsors are GOSHEN and Unilever.

Kim Chang Hui, the Korean who starts from behind to make Class A in the Canlubang leg, is also set to join the Class A.

The other trophy winners in the opening leg later decided to stay in Manila due to school commitments and also to prepare for next week's qualifying for the Callaway Junior World golf championships at Sherwood Hills.

The Imperial siblings—Pinkie, Crystal Ruth and Princess—who pulled off a rare family sweep two weeks ago, spun on the last minute

BUSINESS

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Peso hits 2-mo high at 56.13 to $1

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE PESO yesterday closed at a two-month high of 56.13 to $1 as remittances from overseas Filipino workers as well as trade and portfolio investments inflows started increasing.

Daily a few weeks after hitting an all-time low of 56.45 to $1 on concerns over the country's dwindling foreign reserves, the local currency hit an intra-day high of 56.13 and a low of 56.28 before closing at 56.13 yesterday.

The peso gained 16.1 centavos in a single day from the 56.295 closing before the long Lenten holidays. The volume at the Philippine Dealing System stood at $183.30 million yesterday.

"The peso rose on the back of inflows from OFWs, exporters' dollar sales and portfolio investments inflows," SSP Deputy Governor Armando Estanislao said.

"Also, there was continued dollar demand," he added.

Foreign exchange traders agreed that the peso's sharp gains were fueled by higher inflows. They added that banks were squaring off their long positions after the long holiday break.

OFW remittances are seasonally weak in the first quarter but they start to strengthen in the second quarter for the graduation season and the opening of the new school year.

With this momentum now in favor of the peso, traders and the local currency might test the next psychological support at 56 in the dollar today. However, intervention from the central government's monetary board to stop the peso's ascent, they noted.

The local currency is also buoyed by the improved outlook on the country's external position. The balance of payments surplus is seen to improve, if not return to a surplus, in the month of March due to net inflows from both public sector borrowings.

The BSP's net international reserves, as of end-March, inclusive of revaluation of reserve assets and reserve-related liabilities, would be $21.6 billion, 1.5 percent better than the level as of end-February.

The BSP level, exclusive of revaluation, stood at $12.28 billion as of end-March last year.

The BSP measures the foreign exchange transactions between the economy and the rest of the world. Its major components are the current account and the capital and financial account.

T-bill rates up; bids for 1-yr papers rejected

MARKET interest rates increased in yesterday's Treasury bills auction, still on uncertainties leading to the May 10 presidential polls and on expectations of tighter liquidity brought by Filipino policymakers.

The average 91-day T-bill rate, used as benchmark for banks' lending rates, rose to 7.468 percent or 4.2 basis points higher than the previous week's level.

The Bureau of Treasury awarded the entire offering of 35.1 billion for the 91-day rates.

The 182-day rate also averaged higher at 8.681 percent, against the previous level of 8.612 percent, on a partial award of 91.750 billion against the government's offering of P3 billion.

The 91L, however, rejected all offers for the 364-day T-bills due to high bids. The offers ranged from 8.2 percent to 8.6 percent.

National Treasurer Mita Ignacio said the proceeds on 1940 issues would likely continue despite the run-up to the elections. Quiet counting pressure on the rates, she noted, was the equivalent of higher BSP policy rates.

She said the market preferred short-term instruments given the uncertainty related to the elections.

"But we think there are the rates acceptable to us," she said.

Ignacio hinted at the possibility of exploring offers in fine-tuning auctions if the banks would continue holding the rates up.

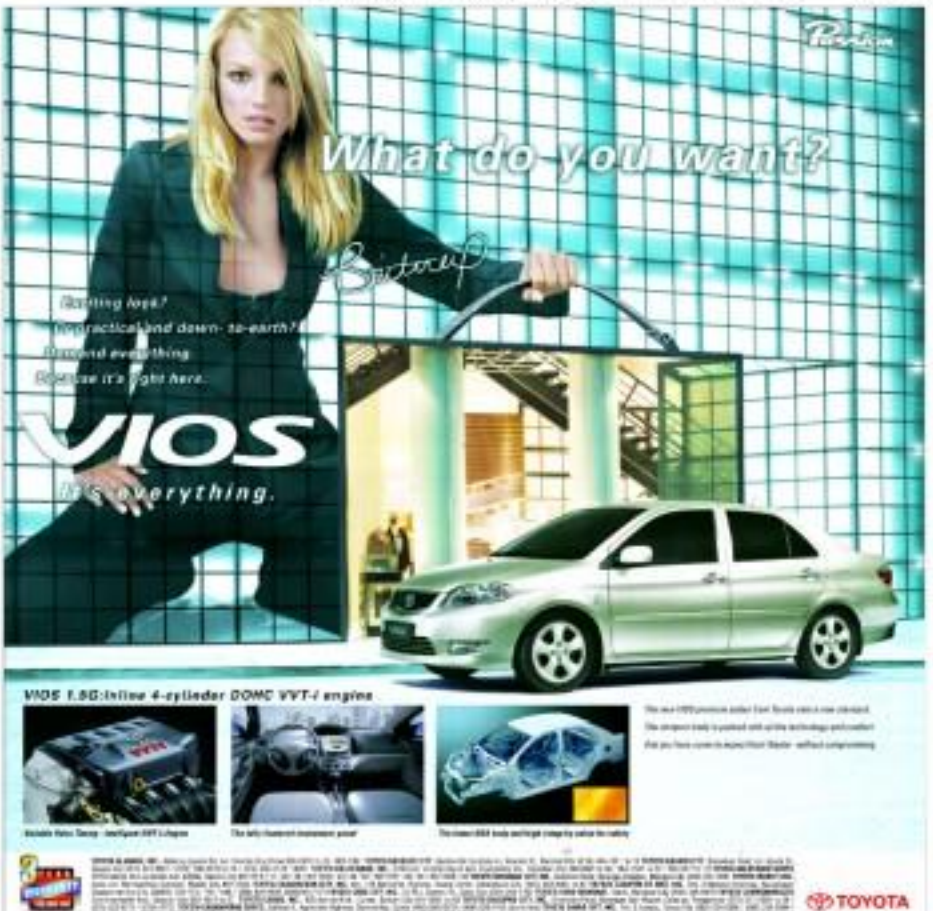
Money market traders said the continued volatility of the peso-to-dollar affecting the T-bill rates.

The BSP, for its part, said the recent peso depreciation was still unlikely to affect consumer prices. The new overnight policy rate setting at the Monetary Board is set for April 28.

By the first time in two years, the T-bill rate, based on the benchmark 91-day T-bill rate, is now higher than the BSP's overnight borrowing rate.

The BSP's key policy rates were at 6.7% percent for the overnight borrowing or reverse repurchase and 9 percent for the overnight lending or repurchase rate.

These rates were last adjusted in July last year when the rates were cut by 25 basis points although the rates were kept at the same level since then, there was a virtual tightening in August when the BSP lifted the ceiling on the banks' phenomena with the BSP. Doris C. Dumlao



ICC allows MWSS to bid out new BOT project

THE INTER-AGENCY Investment Coordination Committee allowed the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System to bid out a new build-operate-and-transfer contract to supply at least 400 million liters of treated bulk water a day.

In a statement, the ICC's lead agency, the National Economic and Development Authority, said the new BOT project aims to address the shortage of water services in Metropolitan Manila.

The project will involve the participation of the private sector, which will deliver some 400 MLD treated bulk water to the MWSS, which, in turn, will sell it to Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) and Manila Water Co. Inc.," the Neda statement said.

The winning bidder will have to identify the proposed new water sources, prepare the feasibility study, the detailed engineering design and the environmental studies. It will be responsible for financing the entire project, including acquisition of rights-of-way, required permits and environmental compliance certificates.

The proponent will also construct all the system components, such as transmission mains, treatment plant, water reservoir, and others, including operating and maintaining the proposed treated bulk water supply system.

The total partnership period between the government and the winning bidder may be at 28 years, with the development and construction period lasting three years and the operating period lasting 25 years.

The proponent will operate the facility over a fixed term, during which it will be allowed to charge facility users appropriate fees to recover its investment, as well as cover operating and administration costs," the Neda said.

Based on several studies commissioned by the MWSS, there is an urgent need to address water shortage in Manila.

For instance, according to the study on water resources development for Metro Manila, which the Japan International Cooperation Agency conducted in February 2003, the most critical period will be in 2012, when the demand-supply gap was estimated to reach as much as 900 MLD.

Based on MWSS projections, there is a need for an additional water supply of about 400 MLD by 2007, with a projected increase of about 200 MLD annually for the period 2008 to 2010.

Doris Dumlao

Veterans Bank posts income rise

PHILIPPINE Veterans Bank, a commercial bank owned by Filipino World War II veterans and their heirs, yesterday reported a 16-percent rise in net income to P227.9 million in 2003 from a year ago.

Total assets of the bank at last year's point to higher interest margins, bigger volume of fee-based transactions, better sales of real and other properties owned and acquired, as well as effective cost management.

The 2004, PVB president Eduardo Infante said the bank expected difficult market conditions to continue.

"However, we are keen on any opportunity that may emerge this year for the bank. Likewise, we will continue to attract both government and private sector markets by developing new product lines to complement banking," Infante said.

Only on years ago in 1998, minus first accounted for roughly 30 percent of the total budget.

Under this year gift-giving administration of Gloriastra, the share of education in the total budget goes down to only 15 percent for 2004.

Schools or not the drop had any

thing to do with presidential candidate Raul Roco, who used to be the education secretary of Gloriastra, is baffling.

WELL, the point is that this cost administration of Gloriastra starts to appear what it calls "interventions" of other presidential candidates like Roco.

And so what kind of economics does it practice—the credit grabbing kind? The supposed "GIFT" of education is that kid must it to find jobs abroad.

But Abad think is right to call it a gift from Gloriastra. The money which which the government spends on education will comes from our taxes.

It's not as if the education money came from the big fat secret bank account of Imelda.

SORRY—I just wanted that out of my chest! And we are actually talking about the possible "gift" from Mala-cañang on that day.

Rhyme does not pay

Conrado B. Banal

WILL she or will she not? This question many up the biggest guessing game in business town nowadays.

You see, it's only about 17 days to go until Labor Day, which we hold every May 1, including election years.

Setting aside only one day of the year for workers, I think, is a good practice for a country which has close to 11 million jobless.

Our economy may be falling behind in net wages, but our Labor law has not—but on top of the world from the wonderful speeches from our politicos.

Meaning Labor Day, you see, it is a good time to any for labor groups to call for the very popular rule-quitting political announcements...you know, a wage increase.

Thus, in business, they are holding their breath on what, ex "gift" that ours administration of Gloriastra will again come up with on Labor Day.

Of some you did not notice, lately the great release factory in Mukenberg has been shutting excise about the president's supposed "gifts" to the people.

Recently, you might have read about Gloriastra's gift of EGEDA-TRON. From what I gathered, the time came directly from the Malacañang factory.

Never mind that, under this ours administration, the silkworm for education actually went down as a portion of total budget.

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SORRY—I just wanted that out of my chest! And we are actually talking about the possible "gift" from Mala-cañang on that day.

In business, particularly those with many workers, they fear the "gift" will have something to do with other people's money again.

You see, the biggest issue in business in the next few weeks will be the wage increase, following calls from labor groups, mostly addressed to...and, Malacañang.

It looks like we are back to the good old days of their reaction which will lead eventually to wage increase.

Of price went up, and with the government giving in to the demand of public transport sectors (i.e. we said for higher fare, could a wage increase be behind?

You see, ever with the deregulation of the oil industry, everything else is still controlled by the government, except the pump prices of fuel, which are now controlled by the oil industry. Do you see any price difference anywhere? They are all the same, right?

Of business, as expected, they are saying that the timing for a wage increase is not right, although nobody said anything about when should be the right time for an increase.

Frankly, I don't mind a pay increase, particularly by unrelated dollar workers like me...since I never had any increase since 1992. What's that—thirty-four-and-no pay? But I am only kidding, hoo!

Still, a study done by Ecop, or the Employers Confederation of the Philippines, should be a good guide for our policy makers.

It showed that for the past 10 years, or since the time of Cory, we have been increasing wages every year, except in 1992 and in 1997.

In all those years, the total pay increase amounted to some 176 percent, meaning that the minimum wage went up by more than one and a-half times.

Such a big jump nevertheless was not accompanied by an increase in productivity in a matter of fact, in those 10 years, productivity even dropped.

Bad does it mean? In business, they are saying that we are losing out to our neighbors. In short, we cannot compete.

Our wages, you see, are roughly five times those in China, which is taking away all the business in the region. Our wages are even higher than those in Thailand and Indonesia.

Then, in business, they are talking about competitiveness. A survey of 30 countries which are in the same level as ours puts the Philippines at the 22nd spot.

Only two years ago in 2002, the same survey showed the Philippines at the 18th place. In just one year we were able to move four slots down. Wow!

And by the way, as far as infrastructure, under the ours administration of Gloriastra, and by dropping "infrastructure," we also managed to plunge.

TURF is the key to business, and I have a feeling that big business will try to put it across in this ours administration that big the Gulf-crossing Ecop affair, which happens before labor day.

Every year, Ecop holds a two-day national conference. This year, it will be held on April 21 and 22, just before Labor Day, and the keynote speaker will be Gloriastra.

It is a good time as any for business to lobby against a wage increase. There are signs that Gloriastra is still trying to win some economic points.

What if, with no dispute or reason, Malacañang just brings out another "gift" on Labor Day and it announces a 10-percent cut in pay increase, can business afford it?

Surely, some businesses will try to adjust by laying off workers.

That will add to the 3 million jobless, a figure which the government, mind you, based on an official unemployment rate of 11 percent, although private sector estimate the unemployment rate at 18 percent.

ON April 21 and 22, National Conference of Employers, as sponsored by Ecop, has this for its theme: "Forging Winning Social Partnership For Global Competitiveness."

Before you shout the people who came up with all that rubbish, let me say that it has something to do, again, with our fighting chance as a country to do business with the rest of the world.

One problem which the organizers seemed to cackle in the conference is the Supreme Court.

Hard to give a talk during the conference is Supreme Court Associate Antonio Eduardo Nachura.

Maybe the Ecop pastors will explain why the Supreme Court can't use annul meddling with all sorts of business contracts, as it rules on every case which comes its way, even if it has no expertise on the matter at hand.

But then again maybe not. The Supreme Court never bothered to explain itself to the public. Why should it bother now, right?

NOTICE TO SHAREHOLDERS OF SPI TECHNOLOGIES, INC.

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TENTATIVE PROGRAM

FPI wants immediate Meralco refund

THE FEDERATION of Philippine Industries yesterday called on the Manila Electric Co. to refund large ratepayers through an immediate reduction of their monthly bills.

The group was referring to the fourth and final phase of a P50-billion refund to consumers, which the Supreme Court ordered last year.

The consumer represents income tax charges passed on to customers between February 1994 and April 2000. (Phase 4 would cost Meralco P10.8 billion).

In a press statement, FPI president Jesus L. Arranza urged the utility giant to implement an immediate, proportional reduction in the current billing of manufacturing companies.

"Industries are the biggest consumers of (electricity)," Arranza said.

"There are companies that have reduced their operations due to the high cost of production, which include power costs."

He said some large manufacturers were spending as much as P60 million per month for electricity.

Arranza added: "Effecting the Meralco refund through a programmed reduction in the monthly billings of these enterprises as soon as possible, will go a long way to reduce costs and help companies become more globally competitive and preserve or create jobs."

Last month, the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry said it was considering to press for an option for large electricity users to convert part of the refund in to Meralco shares.

PCCI executive vice president Donald Lim said in a press briefing the group had been tasked by other business organizations to take the lead in determining how the refund should be done.

For residential users, Meralco had either given out the refund to customers or credited the amount to future bills.

Bernard W. Dominguez

BOI tightens investment rules on auto projects

By Bernard W. Dominguez

THE BOARD of Investments has increased the investment requirements on vehicle makers seeking pioneer status to $100 million from $20 million. This was contained in the guidelines governing the 2004 Investment Priorities Plan, the list of the government's preferred investment areas.

Pioneer status affords beneficiaries incentives such as exemption on import duties and tax holidays.

According to a BOI document, the required minimum exports to qualify for pioneer status was also raised to 10,000 completely built-units of passenger cars and commercial vehicles from only 1,000 units a year. But makers need to export at least US$ 12M a year).

The guidelines allow investment projects that include acquisition of existing motor vehicle facilities.

For motorcycle makers, the required minimum investment was set at $1 million and exports of 30,000 CBUs a year.

Also, the guidelines on pioneer status provided that incremental investments for modernization or expansion projects on vehicle assembly be at least $20 million for cars, commercial vehicles and buses and $1 million for motorcycles.

Manufacturers of generic vehicles that are designed or tooled solely for the Asean Harmonization of Installment Scheme (Asean) market also qualify for pioneer status.

All applicants, however, must be registered participants under Executive Order No. 156 or the motor vehicle development program.

For vehicle parts makers, the following projects may qualify for pioneer status:

- manufacturing of transmissions, engines, as well as tool and die for chassis and engine making;
- cross-border investment or merger between companies across borders involving a strong component complementing with a weak Philippine-based firm, provided that the surviving company would make use of local facilities for global sourcing;
- common facilities for forging parts and components for motor vehicles; and
- supporting industries for the manufacture of transmission or engine or common service facilities for forging or motor vehicle parts and components, provided that the support industries would have supply and/or service contracts with the latter design announced for Asean trade in autos, trucks and buses.

DBCC coming out with new revenue measures for '05

By Boots C. Dumlao

THE BUDGET DEFICIT Development Budget Coordination Committee is targeting new measures would generate P68 billion in fresh revenue to help budget packages next year.

According to a confidential DBCC document, the government aims to finalize the revenue measures during its meeting this week.

The document revealed the agreements arrived at during the March 31 meeting of the DBCC executive technical board.

"The increase in revenues will finance the planned increase in government salaries," said a source from the Department of Finance.

Aside from the revenue measures, which include those in need of legislation as well as some administrative measures, the DBCC is also finalizing its programs, measures and incentives.

Department of Finance sources estimated that, on top of additional revenue from the new measures, the fiscal incentive national tourism program could also yield P2 to P4 billion.

One of the measures expected to boost government revenues by next year is the long-awaited imposition of excise taxes on "sin" products like beer and alcohol.

This reform, which the International Monetary Fund has been pushing for, is expected to yield P1.5 billion.

Another controversial measure being proposed is the imposition of tax on OFW labor remittances.

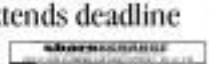
The BOP sources said that this measure, which was being supported by some of the presidential candidates, could yield a low of P1.8 billion or a high of P10 billion.

Tower Awards extends deadline

THE DEADLINE for submission of entries in the Tower Awards 2004 (The Outstanding Workers of the Republic) jointly sponsored by the Rotary Club of Manila and Metrobank Foundation Inc. was extended to April 15.

The awarding ceremonies will be held on June 2, 2004 at The Peninsula Manila Pagoda Ballroom. Tower Awards honors the country's most outstanding non-supervisory blue collar and white collar workers (both male and women) in the areas of basic industries, manufacturing, services, distribution, maintenance and government, community and social services (including NGOs).

Each winner will receive P50,000 in cash, a Tower Award trophy, Rotary/Metrobank Degree from the Technological University of the Philippines (TUP), full scholarship for a bachelor degree and one week accommodation at The Peninsula Manila with spouse.



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Attention: Shareholders of Philex Mining Corporation

The Company is in the process of updating its stockholders records to ensure that all notices of meetings, annual and interim reports, and other correspondences from the company are sent to its shareholders properly.

If there is any change in your mailing address, please advise the Company by filling out the form below and sending it to:

Philex Mining Corporation
Stock Transfers, Inc.
3/F Vernida I Condominium
120 Alfonso Tan St., Legaspi Village
1229 Makati City

or you may fax it to: (632) 818-2370. You can also e-mail to: philex@info.com.ph

Philex Mining Corporation
Stock Transfers, Inc.

Advice of Change of Mailing Address

Stockholder's Name :
Mailing Address From :
To :
Stockholder's Signature :

BUSINESS

Fitch upgrades PLDT rating

By Cherlene S. Bacino

FITCH Ratings has upgraded the rating of Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co.'s foreign and local borrowings to BB from BB minus, following increased improvement in the operations and finances of the country's biggest telecom player.

Fitch believes that the financial prospects of PLDT are more because of the plans of its cash-rich subsidiary Smart Communications Inc. to buy out the stake and control of Philippine Telephone Corp.

PLDT's rating beat the London-based agency's issue-a-par with the sovereign rating, as well as with other agency's credit marks. Standard & Poor's has kept its BB rating, while Moody's downgraded service rating to Ba2 rating of PLDT.

A rating upgrade results to lying down the cost of the entity firm's borrowing as it indicated less risk, giving investors less reason to demand a higher return for their placements.

Fitch also upgraded the rating of PLDT's global bonds and senior notes to BB from BB minus while the rating of the local carrier's convertible preferred stock was raised to B plus from B.

Nelson PLDT's near financial position is weaker than the consolidated profile, Fitch notes that Smart now has greater flexibility to distribute all of its annual net income to PLDT," said the rating firm. "Given greater scope to move cash around the group, the consolidated financial position of the group as a whole is expected to have far greater leeway on PLDT's rating in the future."

Fitch pointed out that PLDT's cash-rich subsidiary is expected to continue delivering the goods for the parent firm.

Smart remitted all its P16.1 billion net income in 2H03 last year, allowing the dominant carrier to post P13.1 billion in net profits despite losses of Philippine Telephone Corp., its third-line business, and provisions it failed recovery.

"The ratings also consider the prospect that Smart will soon regain its complexity interest in PLDT's 43%-owned Piltel and that the carrier will become re-consolidated into the PLDT group," Fitch noted.

Nelson, the ratings firm cautioned that the transaction could lead to increased leverage and weaker operating margins of Smart as well as PLDT.

Still, Fitch said, it recognized the potential operating synergies of the two cellular firms operations. Piltel is also holding billions of pesos in turnaround which Smart could use to reduce its tax payments.

Fitch's stable outlook for PLDT reflected the agency's views that neither competitors nor plans to raise dividends will pose pressure on the stable fixed line business and its rapidly growing and high-margin cellular division," according to Fitch. "Capex at each unit continues to be well managed, thus contributing to PLDT's improved consolidated and unconsolidated net free cash flow generation, to declining and to greater financial flexibility—factors lacking in recent years and instrumental to previous rating downgrades."

But the rating firm stressed that it would continue to closely monitor developments, especially those related to competition as it could affect PLDT's debt profile.

PLDT's total debt stood at $1.9 billion as of end-2003, and the company said it would reduce the level by $200 to $300 million this year. Of the total obligations, PLDT incorporated that pulled $1.5 billion while the rest are owned by Smart.

Smart is mandated by its Congressional franchise to sell 30 percent of its shares to the public this year. But PLDT said it would ask the government to allow it to defer the listing by one year until it needed the dividends from Smart.

PETPlans launches pension plan in dollars

THE PHILIPPINE company PETPlans Inc. recently launched a dollar pension plan which is expected to boost revenue by ten percent.

Dubbed the first of its kind in the retail market, the PET dollar pension plan assures an investment rate of return of at least 4 percent for a minimum investment of US$250.

It is available in three products: the PETS Gold which matures in 15 years and provides cash allowances at the end of the fourth year, the PET ECO which matures in ten years, and the PET ECO which provides benefits at the end of the 15th year.

Lorenzo Ocampo, PETPlans president, said the investment targets the overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), families, and philanthropy among others.

Officials also said the per month fees expects to boost total sales to P2 billion this year from more than P1 billion last year.

Of this number, new sales is expected to hit P300 million.

And P9 billion charges are noted from sold to initial cash from the sale of new plans grew 22% from P1.5 million during the same period last year. Elizabeth L. Mendoza

Leisure firm to issue shares

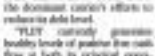
LEISURE firm Fantasy World Theme Parks Amusement and Recreational Inc. will issue shares worth P152 million to its shareholders and developer SCE Realty's development Inc. to cover for development costs of additional tracks in its Batangas theme park.

Paring the move for the secondary offering, the Securities and Exchange Commission recently approved Secretary Pinedo's application to register additional 17,630 membership shares at P8,000 per share.

SCE Realty owns 20.33 percent of the company's present outstanding and owned 97,630 shares.

Under an agreement between Fantasy World and SCE Realty, SCE Realty will advance the costs of the development. Elizabeth L. Mendoza

The land that time forgot



Rene Nathan

I was very uncomfortable at night because I am used to air-conditioning. My wife advised me to blow me. But I think the insect bites on me. She felt annoyed and wanted to make love, but I said, "Ah eat't ... It's Love."

"Eh," she said. "So when and the love long?" He knew always his calmness. Then he provoked me.

I found a dusty-covered brown newspaper, the last to be brought to Cite village. I could not read the date but on the front page, there was a picture of an American General saying, "I SHALL RETURN." The issue of the paper was a commemorative with the outside world, time has passed them by. Nobody ever seems a cell phone because there is nowhere to buy batteries. That is mistake me ... they have a view perhaps. Nobody called Australia, because it only has one cell.

When we returned to Manila, I was shocked to read that in England, terrorists were planning to make a bomb containing modern terrorists. First of all, this is a terrible thing to do, because they are particularly dangerous. They could get the better results if they used bugging. One ton, diffused through the railway seat-lining system, could decimate London.

* * *

LAST Tuesday, the degree of +80 reached 99.97 and I told subscribers to SELL on the first sign of weakness. I trust they all got out yesterday. All stocks are now 30%12, except the telecom stocks, which are still being bought up aggressively by foreign brokers. But even they should be sold as soon as the buying boom dries up. I told subscribers to take their 30% profit on ABSE made in only 6 trading days. After Dolphy spoke, glued in the President, she agreed not to extend Interim Coup Cinema.

The situation in Iraq is far worse than the military admits, but President Bush cannot quit in an election year so he will continue to pour reinforcements into the region. The US has succeeded in militarizing the whole country against him and it will eventually end up as another Vietnam.

Yahoo came out with excellent results, earnings per share up from 8 cents to 12 cents plus a 2 for 1 stock split. Their PE is 36.3% and are on a Price/Earnings ratio of 120. To justify it, the company will have to maintain that rate of growth for the next 2 years. Is that possible? If not, we may see another tech bubble in 2005 or 2006. (rebarbellu@hotmail.com)

DISCLOSURES

BPI/BE Press Resources Inc.'s new ordered editor is C.L. Manalo & Company.

* * *

BANKARD Inc. will hold its annual stockholders' meeting at May 27, 2:00 p.m. at 35 La Salle Hall, 3/F of Ateneo 2 HCRC Main, Makati City. Stockholders of record as of April 28 will be entitled to notice of and to vote at the meeting. Also, the company announced the resignation of Hermenegildo Santiago Sr. as director.

* * *

EAST Asia Power Resources Corp. denied having any information that could explain the rise in its share price from P0.88 to P0.89.

* * *

PHILIPPINE Savings Bank will hold its annual stockholders' meeting on April 30, 4 p.m. at the 18/F of Philbank Center, Makati City.

* * *

METROBANK Share Holdings Corp. will hold its annual stockholders' meeting on April 30, 3 p.m. at the 20/ of Philippine Share Holding Corporation, Makati City.

* * *

BAE ASIAC Investment and Holdings Company Inc. denied having any information that could explain the 50-percent increase in its share price that rose from P0.20 to P0.40 each.

* * *

ANGEL Garcia Jr., director of **Export and Industry Bank** bought 1million shares at the Stock Exchange April 6.

Compiled by Marivee D. Tolosa, PEI Research

Canadian firm to start mining coal in Cebu

By Abigail L. Ho

CANADIAN firm Ronas Energy Corp. will invest on coal production in Cebu, following its agreement to acquire Cebu-based Mangarons Mining and Development Corp.

"I am pleased that we have secured this important asset (the Cebu based firm), which will add great value to our coal diversifying portfolio," according to David Robinson, Ronas Energy president and chief executive, in a statement posted on the company's official website. "The Mangarons acquisition will add significant proven reserves to our low-cost asset, while also assisting in bringing positive cash flow into the company through the extraction and sale of coal to local markets for cement, and later to export markets as production levels are increased."

Right now, Ronas Energy is focusing on oil and gas explorations, owning 46.66 percent of local firm, Ronas Exploration Inc. The firm is currently involved in the development of the Maya fault field in Cebu.

However, the acquisition would only take place upon the completion of a formal due diligence audit of Mangarons's books and approval of the Department of Energy.

Since this late '70s, the family-run business produces around 1,000 tons to 2,000 tons of steam coal per month.

The Ronas Energy statement said that these production levels could still be "substantially" jacked up under the new ownership and management.

According to feasibility studies conducted on the Mangarons mines in 1980 and 1998, the mines are capable of producing commercially viable coal. Its proven coal reserves are placed at around seven million tons, while its potential coal resources are pegged at an additional 12 million tons.

Apart from this new investment, Ronas Energy said it was also looking at other large coal-bearing prospects in other parts of the country and in Indonesia.

Shares close lower

Reuters

stocks ended. Jose Vitug.

Shares said heightened global security concerns after a spate of kidnappings in Iraq dashed foreign investor sentiment.

The main index dropped 6.23 points or 0.61 percent to 1,016.96. The market is up 4.73 percent so far this year.

"I think there's room for further selling with the psychological support at 1,000," Vitug said.

Reuters

Testing an 'anting anting'

/C3

LIFESTYLE

Editor: Cheche Banal-Formoso

DR. Rita Silva-Mallari, head of the Dermatology Center Hair Unit of St. Luke's Medical Center, specializes in trichology, the study of hair and its diseases

THE NEW Pantene Hair Fall Control Shampoo Salon Experience line by 10 stores in 10 provinces is part two months by strengthening hair at its roots.

Although hair is actually dead protein cells, its loss is certainly to be lamented

Rescuing the 'dead'

By Anne B. Jardines

A HEALTHY HEAD may not get a life of vigor and excitement, and enhances a person looks. Ironically, a person's crowning glory, the human hair, is actually made up of dead protein cells.

Still, hair can be the cost of envy for many people, that just to see make someone drop dead gorgeous. It is also capable of making him or her head by simply drop dead. In fact about, about 40 percent of women suffer from excessive falling hair that, if left unchecked, can lead to baldness.

There are many reasons for the hair loss, says Dr. Rita Silva-Mallari, head of the Dermatology Center Hair Unit of St. Luke's Medical Center, the country's first hospital-based hair clinic. Dr. Silva-Mallari specializes in trichology, the study of hair and its diseases. She says young men and women who are only in their 20s and 30s are already seeking medical help for their frightfully thinning tresses.

"The biggest mistake Filipinos make is to self-medicate. The root problem may not be properly addressed, and the misuse of wrong and even with hair products may lead to further damage. Always seek professional help—it will save you money and may arrest the ailment if diagnosed early," Silva-Mallari says.

'Molting'

The hair starts young chemists, however, is not an ominous sign of things to come and should not be taken for alarm. Silva-Mallari explains that many for because, since hair really is relatively easy to the Philippines, young people have just started to seek professional help for different hair problems. On the other hand, older people, especially those in their 60s, may no longer see the need to have their problems seen to.

The expert also stresses that just because the bathroom's drain is clogged after a person washes his/her hair doesn't mean one is going bald. The human head normally sheds some 100 strands a day. Since these are usually replaced by new ones, a clogged drain could simply mean the bathroom needs a thorough scrub.

But if the hair loss is excessive, a friend noted is a friend saved. With 100,000-150,000 strands on a normal head, excessive shedding will reveal a bald-spot, thinly patch on the head in no time, especially since the hair grows on a month's pace of one centimeter per month.

But at least 90 percent of them are growing at any one time. When part of the lost does, the hair may fall off or be pushed out by the next growing hair. The problem begins when the hair is not replenished as quickly as they break off. Hair more accessories is if they are not replaced at all.

Either way, when the bright hair starts in a location. After all, anything else is not a living tissue cannot repair itself on its own, and needs all the help it can get.

Prevention

The problem for many causes, says Silva-Mallari. The most obvious is genetic—if other family members suffer from diffused hair loss, it won't be surprising if another one develops the problem.

Daily washing, brushing, styling, sun exposure, etc. also create the hair to weaken, break and fall out. And regular visits to the hair salon for pressing, coloring, rebonding, relaxing, etc., or perm. On hair to many harmful chemicals.

Illness and medications can contribute to hair problems. "Some even eggs some hair it is not the person's cause," Silva-Mallari adds, although crash diets do cause excessive hair loss because of nutritional imbalances.

The new Pantene Hair Full Control Shampoo claims to prevent loss by as much as 50 percent in just two months by strengthening hair at its roots. The product contains Pro-Vitamin B5, which does help strengthen the hair, Silva-Mallari says. She is quick to point out, however, that the product should not be mistaken for a hair thickening agent.

"Damage to the hair on a day-to-day basis is unavoidable as nearly everyone's daily basis can regimen damages its cuticle and stay or the other, so are hairs—the hair, split ends, tangles, etc. Pay prolonged to young cuticle. Be best to accept this to damage. But we can help strengthen the hair and avoid excessive hair fall," she says.

Pantene's Hair Fall Control Shampoo works on newly born hair, too. Religious application provides renewed hair production. The shampoo is said to give a protection coat of the hair that strengthens it, coupled with and reduces static and friction. Hair then becomes manageable and less prone to breakage.

Unlike customers four-four hairs for a more five months. But hair on the head normally stays for up to five long years before it naturally "dies" and falls out. But lifestyle, environment, nutrition, hair care regimen and more may change all that.

As source of prevention is, indeed, still worth a pound of cure.

E-mail the author at annbjardines@inquirer.com.ph

The versatile coco oil

AFTER YEARS of getting a bad press, coconut oil, is rumored for, is finally starting to clear its name.

Coconut oil has been revered for centuries. Ancient Ayurvedic (Indian) literature says it was used for medical and cosmetic purposes.

Half of the world's population uses coconut oil. It takes about four people to logical institutions using coconut oil have generally good health and register low incidence of heart disease, cancer, digestive and prostate problems.

A recent campaign against coconut oil that flustered my hears (if such it could be) but now coconut oil is no longer considered a "dietary poison." The oil contains a medium-chain fat called triacetin that is considered unique and remarkable. The fat (coco oil is called the low fat oil because it promotes weight loss) is found only in mother's milk.

Coconut oil, commercially available as "Monolaurin (acronym)," is currently undergoing clinical trials as a treatment for genital herpes, hepatitis C and infections with the human immunodeficiency virus that causes the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Clinical results so far have been very promising.

Dr. Bruce Fife, nutritionist and naturopathic physician, in his book "The Healing Miracles of Coconut Oil," explains why we should rediscover the virtues of coconut oil.

Ancient food

The coconut and all its by-products—oil, milk, jam—have been used by millions for thousands of years in Asia, the Pacific Islands, Africa and Central America. Ancient humans who depended on coconut for sustenance did not suffer from cancer, heart disease, diabetes, arthritis and other degenerative diseases. (Afterthe diseases were first imported.)

In Jamaica, coco oil is used as a health drink/tonic to help fight illness. Jamaicans believe the oil strengthens the heart. Filipinos of Filipinos have used it for cooking and treating baldness, dandruff, itchy scalp and to moisturize the hair and skin.

The 2,500 residents of Pukapuka and Tokelau atolls in the northern Cook Islands have been closely observed since the early '50s. The people subsist on coconut, root crops, fish, chicken and pork. Coconut water, milk and meat are their staple. Test results show that, despite a high fat diet, there are no cases of clogged arteries and other heart problems, stroke causes, obesity and appendicitis on the atolls.

INSIDE OUT

Cory Quirino

Heart-friendly

Although coco oil is considered saturated fat (known as the bad fat), so far no legitimate research has shown that it raises blood cholesterol levels when consumed. Perhaps it is because coco oil is a medium-chain fat, which doesn't stay long in the body because it is used primarily for energy. It seems not to stay long enough to become body fat or cholesterol.

"While coconut oil's direct effect on blood cholesterol [is] neutral, it may indirectly lower LDL [bad] cholesterol and increase HDL [good] cholesterol" because it stimulates the metabolism. Low metabolism reportedly increases bad blood cholesterol levels. Coco oil protects against high cholesterol by producing energy, not fat. The oil also fights infection and has anti-bacterial, anti-viral, anti-fungal properties.

AIDS fighter

Dr. Fife tells the story of Dave Taylor, an AIDS victim from Indiana, United States, who, in September 1990, decided to take one last trip. After making arrangements for his funeral, he left for Vacuum off the coast of South America. There he lived with Indians and ate a diet consisting only of cooked coconut and coco milk.

After six months, he regained the 32 pounds he originally lost and left home. When he underwent new laboratory tests, his viral load was down to "undetectable levels." The amount of HIV in his system was no longer measurable. Today, he continues to eat coconut with his covered as breakfast continued it keeps his HIV under control.

Daily dose

Dr. Fife says adults should take 3½ tbsp of coconut oil daily. But there are more palatable ways to enjoy it:

Fruit-infused tea

Mix 1½ cups coconut milk (fresh is best) with any fruit like mango, papaya, peach, strawberries, etc., in a blender. This drink is enough for your daily dose.

Iced cereal

Pre-cook add a tablespoon of coco oil to your cereal and ½ cup of coco milk in your cereal or oatmeal.

Soupy delight

2 14-oz cans of coco milk (or fresh if you wish)

½ cream

3-4 tablespoons broccoli/cauliflower

4 tbsp coconut

½ tbsp flour

½-1 onion

½ a celery

½ tbsp margarine

Salt and pepper

Heat the oil, add flour and stir till golden brown. Add onions, celery, veggie and sauté for 5 minutes. Add coco milk. Cook for 10 minutes. Add seasoning. Blend the ingredients to make a creamy soup.

Beauty rub

After a warm bath, rub virgin coco oil all over your body. In 10 minutes, your skin (including your hair) will feel smoother.

Love and light!

Call International Pharmaceuticals Inc. (Dist. Kelly Foods) at 892 2130975 (Tel/fax) or e-mail admin@ipi-phil.com

Relief for tired shoppers

MOA Time, the first spa to open inside a mall, aims to give shoppers an excuse really to relax after hours of busy shopping.

Owner/manager Stephenie Ng said, with the outlet at SM North Edsa in Quezon City, shoppers would have a place for relaxation if they had a need for it.

Body Time offers the three-hour (walk-in) "Thai massage from therapists who trained in the famous Thai Wat Po Temple.

Also available are Swedish and shiatsu massages, popular massage treatments, and aromatherapy massages that use pure essential oils and a unique system of massage that stimulates the circulation and brings relief to the whole body.

Foot and hand treatments include Thai and reflexology foot massage, hand massage, foot spa and spa manicure and pedicure.

Full body treatments include dead sea salt body scrub, seaweed sea salt polishing scrub, moor mud body wrap, whitening scrub, seaweed slimming mud wrap, caramel nourishing buff, honey body polish and body blending.

Body Time's Bhaktiphyto non-surgical facelift system is a 30-minute treatment that diminishes the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles, improves skin tone and color and firms up facial and neck muscles. The special stone massage therapy uses hot basalt and cold marble stones.

Body Time has branches in SM malls at North Edsa, Pampanga, South Mall, Bicutan, Baguio, Cebu and Manila. Telephone: Call 5098564.

END an exhausting shopping day with a massage right in the mall.

Putting my own 'anting-anting' to a test

Part 2

Last week, I said I would not believe in the so-called powers of anting-anting (amulet or talisman) to protect the wearer from bullets or sharp knives until I've seen it with my very eyes.

Well, something incredible happened in the afternoon of March 26, in a fishing village in Lemery, Lipa, Batangas, which somehow upset my usually logical and analytical mind. I was only impressed some almost feeling fearless (literally) with a sharp, double-bladed jungle knife without being wounded, but I myself was involved.

Yes, what I had been wishing to experience or at least witness for many years now finally became a reality.

It happened upon by accident (although I don't believe in coincidences). Rabindranath Villanueva Jr., an architect who took my assistance several years ago, rang up my office two weeks before to discuss the construction of the garage and fence in my La Mesa property in San Pedro, Laguna.

He saw a paper on my desk with several, which the secretary copied from a newspaper, and asked if I would be interested in the so-called powers of anting-anting (amulet or talisman) to protect the wearer from bullets or sharp knives until I've seen it with my very eyes.

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He saw a paper on my desk with several, which the secretary copied from a newspaper, and asked if I would be interested in

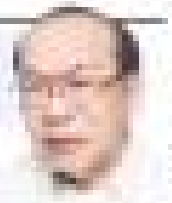
every time bullets bent to me by Lisa Manzano of Bulan City. Jil said he had an extensive and anting-anting collection, but didn't know how to use them.

'Anting-anting' 'authority'

I tried to reach Ged Nicolas of Daring Bakal for help, I then called up Ruben Balangcang of Montalban, whom I knew was a member of the same organization of amulet believers and users. He said he could replace them to Jil, but "there is somebody better than me who can give Jil the 'blessing' necessary to achieve these wonders."

He arranged for us to meet Ged Jose Nicolas Jr., head of the Daring Bakal group in Lemery, Lipa, Batangas ("ged" is tagalog for "brother" and all male members of the organization are addressed that way).

Ged Jose lives on the side of a hill in a poor fishing village in Lemery, Lipa. Seeing the place, it was just worth where we reached the place. With me were Jil Villanueva, his brother Boyet del Rosario, whose father was also into anting-anting, Rusty Manangal, a businessman, researcher and martial arts teacher; and Ruben Balangcang.



INNER AWARENESS

Justice T. Alvarez

Ged Jose' wife and daughter prepared lunch consisting of boiled and grilled fresh fish, pancit and rice.

'Waiting for the 'basher'

After lunch, Ged Jose brought out of his room a 20 x 8 inch double-bladed jungle knife and placed it on the wooden floor nearby. It was used by the "basher" or blessing. Ged Jose asked who among us would be blessed. We all pointed to Jil, and Jil pointed to his mother Rosario del Rosario. Ged Jose said he could make the blessing simultaneously that afternoon.

A female was brought in and Jil was asked to sit on a chair facing the wall. Ged Jose asked, "anybody else?" Boyet came forward and sat next to Jil. It was then I said, "I will have myself blessed, too!" not knowing what I was getting into.

When Rusty Manangal saw me sit on the bench, he, too, said, "Me na rin ngu." We heard the soft laughter of several fleeting Bakal members.

Rusty knew exactly what would take place and how the blessing or basher would be done. But both Jil and myself did not know the exact process. I thought he would just tap our shoulders lightly with the knife, like when the king or queen of England does when making a person a knight.

30-minute ritual

We were asked to sit touching each other's shoulders and to look up, while Ged Jose started to and performed the ceremony or ritual which we did not see. We only felt him blowing air on our heads. The process took about 30 minutes to complete. I was becoming restless.

Then, he asked three of those seated on the bench with me to stand up, except me. Ged Jose said I was to be the first to be blessed. Well, I said to myself, "That's strange. I was the last to enter this thing and I became the first to leave to God!"

Ged Jose asked me to crouch/on look-ing up and to put my two hands behind my back, as if they were tied. Then he positioned himself to my right, with his left hand on my head and his right hand with the knife. It hurt a little but the blade merely bounced off my skin. Then he turned for the second time, more strongly. The same thing happened. He'll be making it again the third time. This time with more power from those before. The third strike hurt the most.

Then he asked me to stand up facing the door, keeping my hands firmly at my back. He again positioned himself to my right, raised the knife and hit me on my stomach three successive times, each time harder than the one before it. The third one was the strongest and I felt the force of the blows each time the blade struck my stomach. It hurt but not to an unbearable degree. The blade simply bounced off my body.

How did I feel the moment the whole incredible process? I have to describe this as accurately as I can next week. Watch for it.

Listen to my dzRH radio program every Sunday 7-8:30 a.m.

Play your game in the mall

SM Supermalls launched its Summer Sports Season at the SM Megamall.

Some of the country's top athletes, sports officials and sports shop executives attended the launch.

Among those who were present were top Philippine Basketball Association (PBA) players Alvin Patrimonio and Paul Artadi of Purefoods, Marlou Aquino and Dennis Espinosa of Sta. Lucia, the Manila team led by EJ Feihl, Harvey Carey and Jimmy Alapag of Talk 'N Text, Rickie Villanueva and Mike Cortez of Red Bull, and Red Bull and Purefoods Assistant Coco Cola.

Also there were PBA Commissioner Noli Eala and their Buddy Encarnado, Alaska team manager Joaquin Trillo, Toby's president Bobby Claudio, Sports Central's Frederick Go, Accel's Willy Ocier, Purple Raider's Gonzalez Tan, and celebrity Manny Ochoa. The National Cheering Squad did a high-energy opening number.

PBA commissioner Noli Eala, Talk 'N Text's Jimmy Alapag and PBA chair Buddy Encarnado

Co-sponsors of the month-long promo ongoing in all SM Supermalls are 8 April 30, the YC and Globe Telecommunications.

In the Food and Shoe Fest Gallery, people can compare food and test shoes with those of PBAs Alvin Patrimonio, Mark Caguioa, Jimmy Alapag, Mike Cortez and EJ Feihl.

PBA fans can see how the 2004 rookies looked as kids at the PBA Photo Gallery. They can shoot an overhead ball and score big points at the Giant Inflatable Basketball Hoop or have a snapshot beside an image of Jimmy Alapag. They can also check out autographed balls at the Molten Basketball Museum.

Shoppers can vote for their PBA Supermen. Best five for every region worth P100 can any store at the SM Supermalls in the PBA Immortals, which will go on a mall tour: April 12-18, SM Supercenter Pasig; April 19-25, SM City Manila; April 19-25, SM Southmall; April 26-May 1, SM City Pampanga; April 26-30, SM City Sta. Mesa; and May 3-9, at SM City Baguio.

Other summer sports activities are also organized by SM malls like badminton tournaments, table tennis clinics, and football and soccer events.

Martial arts enthusiasts will be treated to karate exhibitions by the Association for the Advancement of Karate and a taekwondo competition. Other activities to expect: climbing for exercise sports enthusiasts, fencing instructions, dart clinics and games.

Parents can enroll their kids in clinics at the SM Reading Lovers, and the SM Ice Skating Rink.

Fireflies take wings again

THE 6TH Tour of the Fireflies will be held April 18.

Participants are reminded to bring water and other fluids for drinking, food energy boosters, notebook. They should also take note of ride length, pace, and stops.

Handrails, support and gear rides, and medical assistance will be strategically positioned along the race route.

LIFESTYLE

Exercises for a healthy heart will also give you a tighter behind

Firm up your rear end

WELL AND GOOD

Who doesn't wish for a firmer behind? While it's true that genetics influence the shape of your buttocks, exercises can go a long way.

Whether you want to add bulk and mass to "the" buttocks or lift "Droopy" ones, the exercises are the same. The difference is in the amount of weight needed for resistance and the number of repetitions.

The aerobic activity you choose can also firm up what you may "high and tight" and to save "low and loose." Step aerobics, a ring machine, an elliptical trainer, a recumbent stationary bike, walking uphill, fencing and roller-blading are some cardiovascular exercises that are good for your heart and your gluteus maximus (aptly named because it is the largest muscle in the body).

If you want to add more bulk to your glutes, then increase the resistance on the stairs, ...

Take Charge Doc!

Nicky Schmerova, M.D.

FAQs (Frequently asked questions)

Will my medical records with the HMO remain confidential?

It is our policy to respect the confidentiality of the personal and medical information of our members. In general, confidential information maintained in any treatment setting may not be released to anyone without your written consent. However, by accepting coverage under your health care contract with MEDICard, you authorize providers who render services to you to disclose to MEDICard all facts pertaining to your treatment and physical condition (e.g. diagnosis, medications, etc.), primarily for the purposes of paying medical claims (e.g. professional fees & hospital bills) and for continuing care.

Meet your MEDICard Team

Internist **Dr. Eric Jason Amante** is a MEDICard accredited specialist based in Manila Doctors Hospital (MDH) in Ermita, Manila. Dra. Eric hails from UP College of Medicine and subspecializes in Rheumatology. He finished his residency for his specialization at the University of Connecticut, USA and took his training for Rheumatology subspecialty at the Massachusetts General Hospital. Dr. Amante is also a Clinical Associate Professor for UP-PGH, Department of Internal Medicine, Rheumatology section. For consultations, members may visit his clinic at Room 910 of MDH every Mondays from 1 to 6 PM, Tuesdays, 9 AM to 2 PM and on Thursdays from 9 AM to 4 in the afternoon.

For children's consultation needs at the newly accredited Divine Mercy Hospital in San Pedro Laguna, parents may turn to **Dr. Mary Jane Jill Aber-Siton.** Doctor Siton, a Medicine graduate of Bodo Doctors' College of Medicine, specializes in the field of Pediatrics. Doktora is a known expert not only on children's health but also on loving them as exemplified by her being a mother to two boys and very soon to her third baby. For consultations, visit her clinic at Room 5 every Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, from 10 AM to 12 noon.

Recently accredited dentist **Dr. Eileen C. Lorenzo,** addresses MEDICard members' dental health needs in the south of the Metro. Doc Eileen began her career as dentist professional after finishing Dental Medicine at Centro Escolar University in 1995. Soon she operates her own clinic, the Lorenzo Dental Clinic located at Room 204 of the Emilia Bldg., Alabang-Zapote Rd., Las Piñas City. She also has special training as an extern for an Oral Surgery Program at UP-PGH and a Preceptorship in Orthodontics at the Orthodontics Study Center. Visit her clinic from Mondays to Saturdays, 9 AM to 5 in the afternoon. You can also set an appointment with her online through her website www.lorenzodentalclinic.com.

MEDICard is the first HMO in the Philippines and the whole Asia Pacific Region to be ISO CERTIFIED

AFRIKIM lobby of Crystal Serenity

THE 'HUT' elegant Cigar Room where the rich and famous enjoy the best cigars from all over the world

DURIAN a poolside barbecue, tables were filled with fruits and healthy fare—and for those desserts

THE 338-STAR Crystal Serenity, our luxurious floating island for 12 fantastic days

MASTERS of fusion at the Lido Deck 12. (left) Patrick Jordan, Robert Capito, Ronnie Capino (right) Richard Arnaldo, Albert Jerome, Michael Ledesma, Michael Margate and Danilo Mauricio

Playgrounds of the rich and famous

WITHOUT BATTING AN EYELASH

Maurice Arcache

Photos by Alice Ilao Hagen on Kodak Max

CRYSTAL Cruises aims to provide the best large luxury cruise ship experience in the world. An important part of the Crystal difference is the opportunity to cruise with style, sophistication and well-traveled persons from all over the world. The cuisine, the fab ambiance, the excellent service, the five-star restaurants... and all the spaces... ahhh!

But the best part, jadongpoy, was our Penthouse suites complete with a Hondo, Missouri Studio baths called Klimo. Hot suite, in rich mahogany and rosewood, made me feel I was not in a floating palace but in some luxurious country hotel in Cape Town or Biritu.

A huge living area, big private verandah, complimentary bottles of red and white wine upon embarkation, daily supplies of all possible drink soda, beer and bottled water, separate dinner and writing table, a large walk in closet, flat screen Plasma television with DVD and CD players, and, in the bathroom, a full Jacuzzi, separate shower and twin wash basins.

Now, dahlings, if that isn't classy I don't know what is.

We were based out cruise, down the Adriatic, enjoying the endless facilities on board, all the facilities in various we could dig into after 10 hops around the peninsula deck, passing by the well-packed Mount where this Bernie Kopina, the Filipino librarian, always had a big smile.

At The Studio, Studios G, was learning Pirouetting Bon Jovi, aerobics for passengers.

On the stalls, another Filipino crew member, pianist Pal Calimora played "Speak Softly Love" from "The Godfather" at the upstairs Lobby as the Crystal Serenity docked in Messina, in the heart of Sicily.

Mob's home turf

Sweltering Sicily is, nonetheless, a rich blend of culture. And has cooking is to die for.

As I munched in Sicily (but the Italian "mob" (which you forget exists) calls this island "home." The whole region is among the most sun-spots in the Mediterranean.

While most Crystal Serenity passengers took the shuttle to Taormina, some trekking to the Etna Volcano, Rita and me braved the drizzle and walked the streets of Messina as the vehicles toiled expectedly slowly.

Naples, jadongpoy, known for, among others Neapolitan Pizza, was our next port-of-call. Napoli (in Italian), also called "Magna Grecia," is considered the capital of southern Italy. The name immediately conjures a kaleidoscope of brilliant architecture—ancient, royal, well-defined and sometimes concerning.

Florence was next on our Italian itinerary. The capital of Italy from 1865-1871, it is about two hours from Livorno, where Crystal Cruises docked. In Florence, we purchased a "hop on, hop off bus" ticket to see the sights.

Meeting 'David'

Florence is where masters Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and others roamed unparalleled works of art. It was once ruled by the powerful Medici family, who supported by the Florence and the Pope.

We braved the long lines to catch a glimpse of the magnificent and famous statue of Michelangelo's David—the original, not the replica that stands in the Piazza della Signoria.

In Florence, I had a long chat with one of Mandilo's favorites, Mad Mat Cajiuangco, who now works in that city of art and romance.

After a night at sea, a dazzling sun welcomed us in Villefranche, a small wine charmer town in the French Riviera where we spent two full days. Villefranche is the gateway to the famous Cote d'Azur, where the world's rich and famous dine, dance, drink, see and are seen.

We visited the 14th century Chapelle St. Pierre near the town's citadel, built by the Duke of Savoy in the mid-16th century. The 400-year old citadel has five museums.

Villefranche is a five minutes away from Monaco, Monte Carlo, a principality on the Mediterranean coastline.

'Face value'

Sorcherie goes to Edmonde "Neno" Lazaro, hotel restaurant hostess hong kong-based socialite and bought us to his stunning hillside villa. We basked at the world-famous Cafe de Paris. The queue outside long it seemed like all the 1,877 passengers of the Crystal Serenity were there, but, Eduardo, a long-time Monaco waiter, was a frequent diner at the cafe (among the best places to eat if there's to be matter if, upon seeing him, whisked us off to one of the best tables.

The next day it was Nice. First catch down the Promenades des Anglais, then the Vieille Ville or old town, where we were window shopping.

After the captain's cocktail and dinner reception the next evening, we arrived at the stunning capital of Catalonia, Spain—Barcelona, named by Time magazine "The European City of Today" and "Man 'n City" in Europe.

Barcelona is an ancient port on the Balearic Sea. There's some festive influence here since Northern Africa is a few sailing days away.

Dining out here day-long we went to Las Ramblas, the heart of the city, almost every day for the yummy Moroccan Fideli-stand with.

Builder of 'sand castles'

Barcelona is where Antoni Gaudi, the sun-of-the century architect and genius, did his works that sometimes a child's fantasy sand-castles. One of his most famous works is the Sagrada Familia Church, which is over 100 ft tall and undergoing construction until now.

After our 12th and last night in our beautiful Penthouse suite in the new Crystal Serenity, we moved to our "home" in the Condesa capital, a gorgeous one bedroom suite in the venerable, exclusive Club Internacional.

Tomorrow in Flores, stop

THE FAMOUS La Promenade des Anglais in Nice, Cote d' Azur

PICTURE-PERFECT view of Villefranche-sur-Mer in the Cote d'Azur in the French Riviera

SINFUL calorific desserts on Crystal Serenity's grand-ear-always-can-day

THE BONBEDUS Russian Orthodox Cathedral in Nice

THE GREAT FIGHTING Casino de Monte Carlo

DANCE DIVA'S famous must-go-to Las Ramblas de las Flores

THE STILL-RISING BUILT master-famous Sagrada Familia church by Antonio Gaudi in Barcelona

QATAR'S Business Class is like no other. It is the first to offer Sogurmo Sleeper Beds and its 10.4" video monitors, plus a river massage bar.

Firm up your rear end

From page 1M

stepper or recumbent bike. If you only want definition, keep the resistance light.

Variations on a theme

The primary exercises in this column that work the buttocks are variations of squats and lunges, also called compound exercises since they involve other major muscles. Be prepared to eventually lift a daily heavy amount of weight since the buttocks are a large muscle.

The exercises also work the front and back of the thighs. Which is just as well, since buttocks and most thighs are usually attached to the legs, which also need some lifting out.

If you only want to define and lift your seat, don't be scared of squats and lunges – just don't lift heavy weights. Go for more (15 to 20), rather than less, repetitions.

Isolation exercises specifically target the buttocks and the hamstrings in the back of the thighs, which share the same functions – lifting your leg behind you or lifting your body upward from a bent-knee position.

More weight, more bulk

Again, if you want bulk, use more weight and less repetitions per set (8-12). If you want definition and toning, use less weight and more reps.

To make the most of your isolation exercises and to protect your lower back, make sure to squeeze your buttocks before you even move your leg back- ward. You don't need a very large range of motions to achieve results. Moving with concentration will really create your lower back. Move in slow, controlled motion.

"A moment on your lips, forever on your hips" is not true from the neck. Any excess calories will be stored in your hips and thighs if you are genetically predisposed to store fat that way. So, if a fairy bobbed in the problem, remember that what you eat plays a major role in keeping your measurements under control.

Blame estrogen

Sometimes, however, even if you watch what you eat and exercise religiously, the area of your body often down but your hips, buttocks and thighs stubbornly refuses to budge.

Scientists believe this has something to do with the reproductive process. Estrogen multiplies fat-storing enzymes and, even fat to be stored in a woman's lower body. Gifts in that area can, and most fat-storing receptors. A mentor Mother Nature has made sure that a woman has an abundant store of fat to stay fertile, carry a pregnancy to term and breast-feed when food is scarce.

This doesn't mean you should give up eating healthy and exercising regularly. You can still reduce your hips, buttocks and thighs considerably. However, you do have to be realistic and accept that your buttocks may always be larger than you like.

Some people resort to liposuction to get rid of fat in the lower body. This is certainly a quick way to achieve dramatic results but, if you choose this option, make sure to control what goes into your mouth and continue exercising. Fat has a funny way of showing up in the strangest of places. Don't get overconfident and end up a victim.

Temporary relief

The buttocks and back of the legs are also famous for having not-so-cute dimples. This is because, aside from being an important factor, a woman's ability to split duties and money to that area. Here is where the anti-cellulite creams and gels come into the picture. They tighten the skin to clear area temporarily. If this helps you feel better about your figure and you have money to spare, then get some. Just don't believe some- person claims about "melting your fat away."

Cellulite-riddled buttocks and thighs look better when the muscle underneath are firm and tight. Here are exercises that can help.

- www.tinajansdiary.info/exercises/buttocks01.html

- www.tinajansdiary.info/exercises/tabletopwithoutstretch-diff.html

- www.tinajansdiary.info/exercises/sumoplie.html

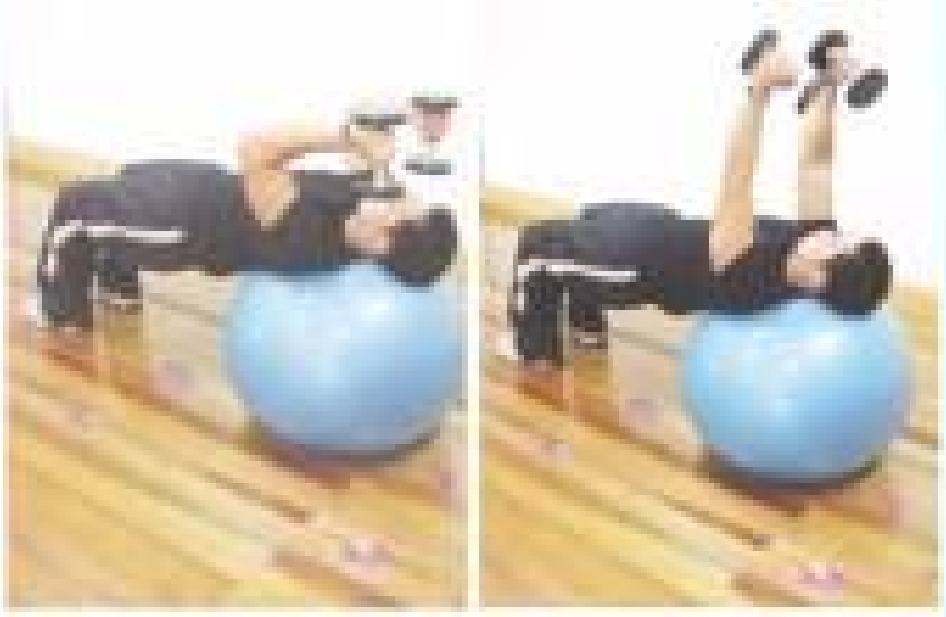
- www.tinajansdiary.info/exercises/singlelegdeadlift.html

- www.tinajansdiary.info/exercises/singlelegbridge.html

Lastly, there is one exercise you can do anywhere – until, almost, your clench the cheeks of your buttocks together as hard as you can (remember to breathe) for about 10-15 seconds. If you can do this many times throughout the day, you will be rewarded with a firmer derriere. A word of caution, though. If you intend to do this while waiting in line, for example, make sure you don't wear tight pants and no one is standing behind you.

Visit www.tinajansdiary.info

EXERCISE OF THE WEEK



Supine tricep extension on stability ball

THIS exercise tones up the triceps or muscles at the back of your arms, "core" muscles (abs, trunk, lower back) as well as the buttocks and hamstrings.

Equipment:

Stability ball, dumbbells. A gym bench or bed can be used as a substitute for the ball.

Exercise technique:

1. Start by sitting on the ball with the dumbbells held close to your chest with your arms bent (not shown).

2. Move your feet forward as you simultaneously lower your upper body until you are in a table-top position with your knees in line with your shoulders.

3. Take your arms overhead with the palms facing each other. Slowly bend your elbows. This is your starting position.

4. Without moving your shoulders, straighten your arms as you exhale. Inhale as you bend the elbows back to starting position.

5. Do the desired number of repetitions.

Performance tips:

1. This is an exercise that should only be attempted by someone experienced with using a stability ball.

2. To protect yourself, use a ball that is not brand-new/using a ball that will deflate slowly if punctured and will not collapse suddenly under you.

3. Use a reasonable amount of weight. This exercise is not meant to lift very heavy weights. Be gradual in its control and challenge of the core.

4. Keep your buttocks contracted so that hips stay level with the shoulders.

5. Straighten your arms slowly and with control. Avoid jerking the dumbbells and "locking" your elbows.

Repetitions:

Do 12-15 repetitions. One or two sets.